

AMANULLAH EX-KING OF AFGHANISTAN





Photo by "Daily Mail."

AMANULLAH ARRIVES IN EUROPE

AMANULLAH

EX-KING OF AFGHANISTAN

BY
ROLAND WILD

LATE SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT FOR
THE "DAILY MAIL" IN AFGHANISTAN



“ Kabul town's a blasted place :
Blow the bugle, draw the sword.”
Ford o' Kabul River



*Publishers
since 1812*

HURST & BLACKETT, LTD.
LONDON

First Published June 1932

Printed in Great Britain at
The Mayflower Press, Plymouth. William Brendon & Son, Ltd.
1932

TO BILL

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AMANULLAH

EX-KING OF AFGHANISTAN

CHAPTER I

A BIRTH IN THE AFGHAN HILLS—AMANULLAH, “PEACE OF GOD”—PRIESTS AS MENTORS—AN AFGHAN WEDDING—THE GREAT WAR—“IF I WERE KING . . .”

THE rattle of rifles echoes through the ravines. It is an irregular volley that is fired. There is first a crack that shatters the peace of the evening. No sooner has it died down than there is answer. From over the hill, mingled with its last reverberation, there comes another. Then again, till it is difficult to divide echo from explosion. And as the last rays of the dying sun catch the snow on the grave and fearful top of the Hindu Kush, the whole pleasant valley of Paghman seems to be a sounding-board for the sharp staccato of rifle-fire.

But it is not war. It is peace. Here is jubilation, expressed in the traditional manner. The rifles are fired carelessly, the triggers drawn before the rough butts have reached the shoulder. There is a laugh on the face of the men who fire, and there is laughter when the stones

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rattle down the sheer face of the rock, dislodged by a mountain goat as it starts in terror from the sound.

The shots are telling news. Over the hills a man starts to his feet, at first with a curse, and grabs his rifle, leaning against the face of the hill. Then his face softens, and he smiles, and the barrel goes up in the air, and yet another report echoes out to tell the news yet further.

For a son is born in Afghanistan.

Yet even the expenditure of one shot is no mean tax on the fighting resources of any of these men. The old hills would retain their evening peace if this had been a daughter. The news would not be told. The bullets would find a lodging perhaps in man or beast at some later date. The carbine, bought after so great a scrimping and saving, from the native factory at Kohat, would be the younger by one bullet in its two-hundred-bullet life. Perhaps to-morrow, or the next day, the news would come by word of a neighbour, that, more's the pity, a daughter had been born.

Allah is great, and here is a son.

But there is more in the fact than this. For a Royal son is born, and his name may one day precede the title of Amir. Not the first born, it is true, nor the second. But then, strange things have happened before in this strange country, and only Allah knows what will happen. For he is the son of Amir Habibullah Khan, and grandson of Amir Abdur Rahman, great and stern men who ruled at Kabul. Here, then, is another bullet for the rifle, and another rending of the peace of that valley, now hidden in the night so quickly fallen. A son in Kabul City for the Amir !

The old bearded man of the hills, tending his flocks of goats on the side of the hill the next morning, hailed his neighbour, bearded and long and lean like himself, over the valley.

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He cupped his hands and called with the long low note that carries and swells as it travels. The voice fell as he called.

“Oo-o-o,” came the voice across the green valley. “Greetings, and do you know what they will call the son?”

The reply was pitched in the same low musical voice.

“They say he is called ‘Peace of God.’ His name is Amanullah.”

It is the winter of 1890. The snow lies thick on the ranges of hills. Up above, the early sun already catches the peaks of the Hindu Kush. The hills seem to merge in the clouds. New territories are there, new continents and ethereal lands of many colours. Who can tell, in this brilliant light of blazing sun on deep snow, whether they be crag or cloud?

Amanullah. The soft consonants were borne by the breezes many times that day across the valleys of the wild land. From mouth to mouth the syllables passed, the name travelling into every hamlet and every scattered group of tumble-down huts clinging to the hard, cruel earth.

“Peace of God.” The word was common currency over the samovars in the cafés. It was spoken by gaunt men crouching on their heels on the little parapets, warming their hands on the tin cups containing sweet tea. Their eyes are keen and their cheekbones prominent. Their legs are long and their proud beards seem ready to menace a stranger.

“Peace of God,” they say again—and hitch their rifles up on their slings, stride off along the goat track.

How the great hills must have laughed when they

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heard that name and understood its meaning in the country of bloody history.

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Just outside Kabul, in the pretentious house which saw the arrival of the youngest Prince, there were many rites and ceremonies to be performed. For a month past his mother had been in strict privacy. The midwives had been carefully watching her health. Relatives had been in the house for some hours before his august arrival, and the compound of the house was filled with the tom-tom beaters who would announce the event to the multitude waiting for news. Musicians are there too, ready to expend all their energy in proclamation of the event. And when the news is shouted from the portal, no evil spirits may live near the child through the hubbub which reigns in that happy household.

“ May your days be happy and prosperous ! ”

“ God is Great ! ”

So went the salutations in the crowded household, between servants, the pampered midwives, practising their art dictated by all the folk-lore of a superstitious nation, relatives, and friends. The poor, outside the gate, find their laps overflowing with precious grain, money is scattered on the roads, while every man and every woman reads the omens according to his own knowledge of the art, and pronounces accordingly.

The chatter of the women, each offering their own infallible remedies to ensure the strength of the child, drown the clatter of the horses' hooves, as couriers are despatched to far-away relatives to acquaint them personally with the news ; though it is probable that the rifle-fire has already told them all they wish to know, it would have been a grave breach of etiquette to forget this custom.

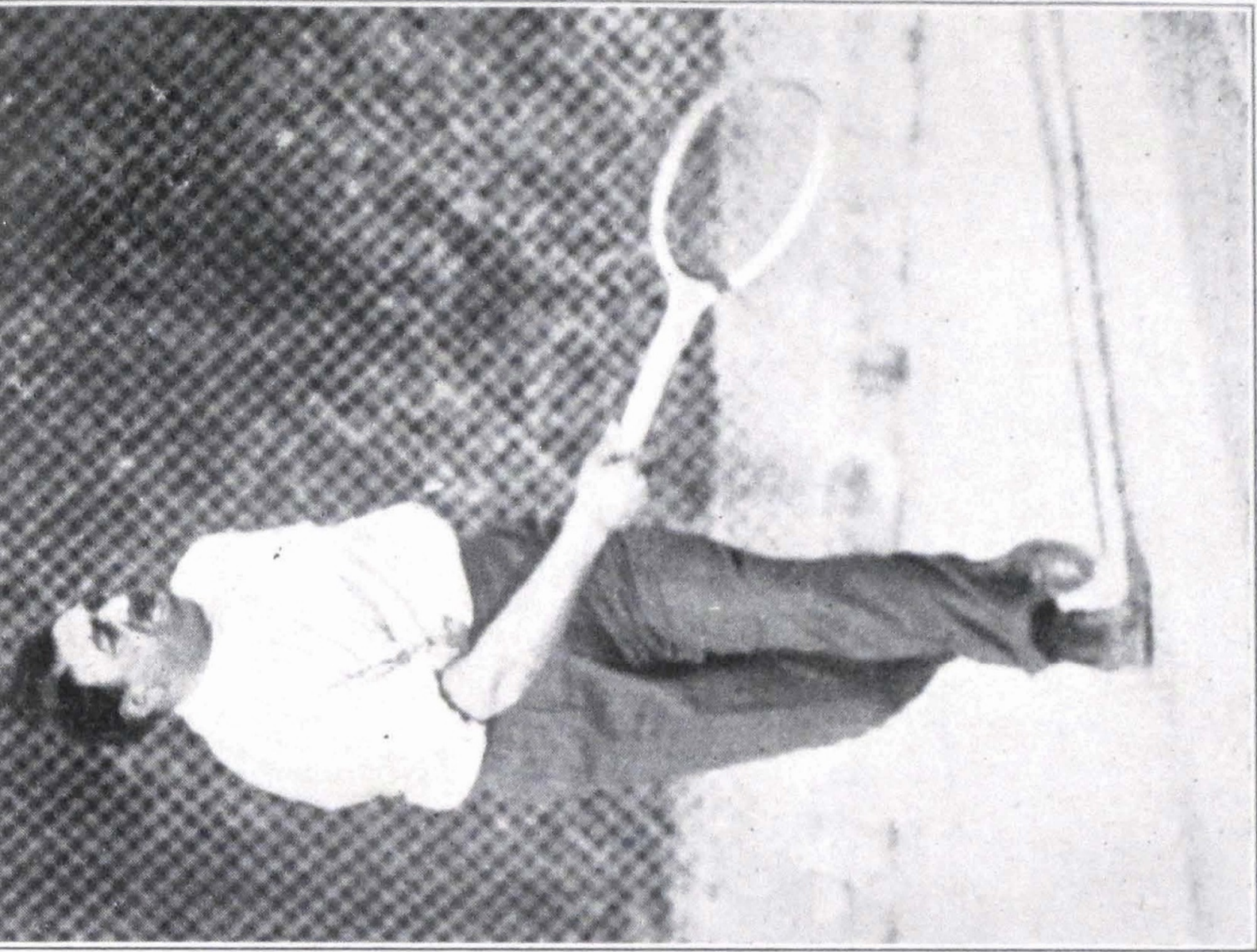
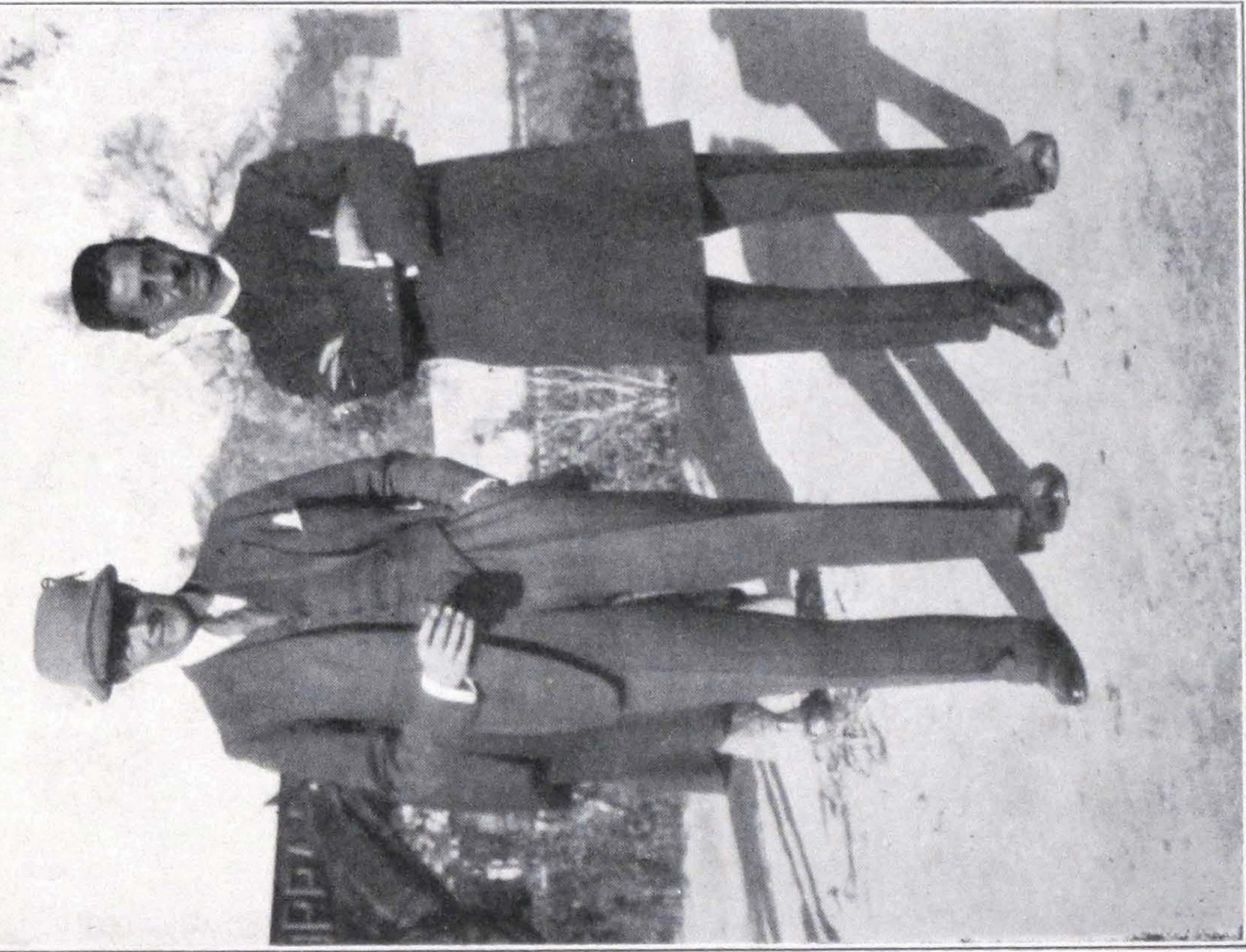


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And in the small, well-heated, and dimly-lit room, the young Amanullah lies in a silk cloth, the words of the Koran on the portion covering the breast, breathing the scent of religious offerings burning in the corners.

The child has no religion. Every care has been taken that the private lives of the attendants are impeccable. It has even been assured that the wet-nurse is married to a fighting man of unimpeachable bravery in the field. But very soon after the birth, there comes the holy figure of the Imam, sonorous of voice and impressive of demeanour, with his traditional prayer extolling the greatness of God in the child's hearing. From that moment Amanullah, "Peace of God," is a Moslem.

In early youth there are further ceremonies. The barber comes with his tools of office, not this time for his ordinary duties, but charged with the sacred mission of making the child clean in the sight of God by shaving his head. Embroidered handkerchiefs, scented water, and a new razor are used, and the young Amanullah, we may imagine, protests violently at the ceremony, even though for the first time he is dressed in all the finery of an Afghan child's gaudy coat and waistcoat.

The relatives are reminding each other yet again of the precautions to be observed during early life. Never must he be taken out at night, they whisper. Especially must he keep indoors on Thursday nights. The eyes of the stars are dangerous, and even the nurse must not eat cereals on a starry night. They must beware of the sunshine, not because of the fear of sunstroke on a head already hardened to the fiercest rays, but because the vultures may drop their eggs on his head—a sign of terrible ill-omen.

The chief fear, of the lightning flashes, does not apply to this child, for the witches say that they strike only the first-born.

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“And remember,” say the old women as they leave, “remember to keep his face veiled. There is no need to tell you of the evil eyes of beggars and thieves. . . .”

So the excitement dies down, revived for a short time when the boy loses his baby teeth. They are thrown into a mousehole, so that the new teeth may resemble those of the mice. Charms hang round his neck by now, and the tiger claw forms the centre of a string of beads. And eventually he shows his stature, and gives promise of the fighting man he is destined to be.

The hills are his playground. Round Kabul, the city fringed with the mountains that have made it invulnerable to all the hosts which have passed that way to India, the young Prince ranges the goat-paths and wanders far and wide in his search for adventure. A fine horseman at an early age, a youth outstripping his brothers in his achievements in the field, but quite willing to lag behind them in the bookish world, he soon grows familiar to the hillmen who tend their flocks on the heights overlooking the city.

He is known in the city too, and though always attended by retainers, it is said that he causes them many fears by his anxiety to elude their vigilance and embark on his own into the labyrinths of the bazaar. From the tall counters of the money-changers, whither he would climb, he throws down money joyfully to the swarming beggars in the narrow street. He would ape the street gamin, stealing the sweetmeats from the cookshops, and when the shopkeepers see the brilliantly-clad little figure disappear in the crowds, they wag their heads together and say : “There goes a true Afghan, who can laugh a little. . . .”

He is already armed at the age of ten. The rifle specially made for him fires half-charges, and with immense pride and arrogance he scours the hills after

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game, imagining himself already the complete hunter of the wild hills.

And then, as an end to the wild free life of his boyhood, come the sedate mullahs with their books and papers under their arms, scripts and pens and texts, for the curbing of a young Afghan's impetuosity and the education of a roving, adventurous mind.

They teach him history. They tell him of the feats in war of the Afghan hillmen, irregular troops from the outskirts of a savage land. They tell him of the hordes of Persians who battered and crashed at the gates of Kabul. Of Mahmud, his ancestor, magnificent in his armour, marching at the head of 20,000 untrained men, to slash through the might of Persia, double their number. Of the dire revenge that followed, and the cold-blooded massacre of the two thousand guards and the whole of the Persian Royal Family.

They tell, being bloodthirsty and loyal religious gentlemen, of the rout of the Turks, and the blood that flowed after that mighty feat of arms. They tell of Shah Alam, giving himself the title of "King of the World." An Afghan, he, of the blood.

The youth's eyes, we can imagine, wander often through the windows to the hills round Kabul, from which so many hundreds of thousands of arrogant eyes had looked down upon their prey. He muses upon Bala Hissar, which still retained for me, when I saw it, a glamour and a heritage of blood. The ruins of the great fort look down upon Kabul still.

Perhaps the old mullahs tell of the Pass of Jagdalak, of terrible memory, where 4500 British and Indian soldiers perished in the greatest ambush known in Eastern history. And on his next journey to the old Winter Palace in Jallalabad, the young Prince rides through that valley of death with many a thought for the

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strange white people across the border, who hold the rich prize of India. Not many years later he was to clash swords with the famed armies of that race.

True, there are Englishmen in Kabul, tenacious and courageous in a land which had always cost them lives and money. But the missions to the capital are not greatly in evidence, and the relations between Afghan and Englishman always under a strain. Besides, here perhaps the mullahs put in a word of their own.

“Afghanistan for the Afghans!” is their theme. “This is the forbidden land!”

Perhaps that age-old battle-cry of the holy men has its effect at that age on his youthful mind, but, if so, it was easy to expel, as history showed. Released from the supervision of the mullahs, too, he grows restive of their influence over all the land. He “sees straight,” does the youth with the strong, agile body and the black, fearless eyes. He sees the evil of a priest-ridden peasantry. He sees the corruption of the Church, as another King has done since his day—and suffered the same fate. And by the time he is little more than a youth, he grows actively resentful of the wholesale regard for the priests, and tends to link his life more and more closely with the life of the soldiers.

Marriage intervenes. He is older than is the custom for bridegrooms in his country, and we can imagine that he grows impatient with the ritual which must attend his wedding when he might be out with his troops, jousting with them in every sporting event, leading them in the games and the tests of military prowess.

He must change uniform for more ceremonial clothes. He must busy himself with all the considerations of caste and heredity, and he must pursue his betrothed, a certain Shahazadar Khanum, with all the elaborate details which

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the old gossips of social Kabul delight in. There is the pretence of this being a casual friendship, the true motive being sanctimoniously concealed. There are the whispered rumours and the business conversations. Lastly, when the old gossips had long ago arranged every detail to their satisfaction, there is the visit of close relatives to the mother of the favoured girl.

Long speeches follow, ending with the plea : " My son is well favoured and strong. Yet he will be gentle in spirit and meek in the delight of marriage with your daughter. He would be as dust on which your daughter may tread. . . ."

And the object of these compliments is the happy-go-lucky youth with the arm of a giant and the constitution of a horse, even at that moment fretting at the delays that keep him from the leadership of his cavalry. Such an allegation of meekness in any other circumstance would hastily end in retribution.

Even after thus coming out into the open, nothing further is done for months. Amanullah has not yet seen his bride. Save now and then he may have caught a glimpse of ankles beneath the all-enveloping folds of her white *purdah*. He may have guessed at pale blue Afghan eyes through the lace network before her face. He may have heard the tinkle of her laugh. No sort of courtship, this, for a man who is already called by his troops by the affectionate nickname of " Amanullah the Impetuous."

The breaking of sugar-loaf follows. Relatives, always ready for partaking in any intimate domestic festival, with its music, sweetmeats, and gaiety, are already clustering round the parents' doors. There is a regular ceremony to mark the betrothal. There is a procedure for every stage of the preparations for the wedding itself. The mullahs are at the house again, invoking the

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aid of the gods, scaring away the evil spirits, urging the need of prayer and good living on all and sundry.

Presents fly round the family. All are laid down by custom, all are given in the name of Allah. And eventually the invitations are sent out, ending with a poem of the most flowery language, every poet vying with his neighbour in the composition of fulsome wishes and adjectives.

And as he prepares himself for the ceremony in his finest clothes, we can picture the tempestuous Amanullah, nerves taut, reading impatiently such phrases as : “ The birds, with their sweet songs, have brought joy to the leafless trees, which flutter like a bird without feathers, as the wind passes through their branches laden with the fragrance of wild flowers. The sun has poured gold in the water of the rivers at sunset, and the moon has shed liquid silver on the crystal ponds. . . .”

But in the year 1910 the ceremony is performed, in a pavilion specially erected for the occasion, and the stolid figure of the third son of the Amir, destined to play a part in Eastern history seldom equalled in its drama, its pathos, and its occasional broad humour, sits on the stool of honour with his bride and signs the papers, attested by every relative who wishes to partake of the honour.

The pipers play them in and out of their wedding house. The drums beat incessantly from cock-crow to sundown. The maids of honour hurry with gifts and clothes to and from the frightened, imprisoned bride, during this time receiving a so-called beauty treatment. The wedding feasts are over. The Imam of the Mosque has paid his ceremonial visit. The turbulence and the shouting dies down. The beggars waiting outside the gates are flung their quota of alms. Sherbet is drunk by every guest, and with the sound of a

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thousand good wishes in their ears, the exhausted bridegroom and his bride leave the celebrations.

Amanullah goes back to his troops, and flings himself yet more vigorously into the uphill task of creating an efficient and disciplined army. He is now taking long trips into the outermost regions of his land. He is bolder and even more outspoken. The fame of his feats of arms and horsemanship spread to every village in Afghanistan. He is superb, foolhardy, contemptuous of danger.

Two years after the wedding his wife dies giving birth to Shahzadajan Hidayatullah Khan, and the rifles of the hillmen speak that night over the valleys in celebration of new life, unaware that there has that day died a woman who might have saved Afghanistan from a further period of rapine, torture, and wholesale slaughter.

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It can be surmised that in due time Amanullah recovers from the shock of his first wife's death. The son lives, and bids fair to become such an one as his father. Amanullah is twenty-three, and becoming a power in the land. He has won many of the rifle competitions. He has scored continual successes on the race-course. He has exhausted the finest fighting men of the land in long forays over the hills after game. His house is hung with the most precious spoils of the chase. Fabulous stories are told of his horsemanship, of his strength in the wrestling bouts, and of his skill with the revolver.

Even in the house of his father he commands respect. His eldest brother, Inayatullah, is a jovial, pleasure-loving soul, and has little liking for the competitive fields of sports and assaults at arms. He is the bookish, elder brother to the life, and is inclined to smile in a superior way at the enthusiasm of his young brother. He

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disapproves slightly of the undignified manner in which Amanullah haunts the bazaars of old Kabul.

Amanullah's appearance on the parade ground is hailed with cheers. A popular reception awaits him wherever he goes.

"There," say the old men, "there goes your true Afghan."

And in truth, there is need in these days for a "true Afghan."

Rumours of war fill the air. Certain rich and scheming strangers have come to Kabul. Presents are loaded on the old Amir. The British are back on one of their frequent representations, and have laid siege to the affections of the ruling house. A new interest is being taken in the Army, its numbers, and its efficiency, and young Amanullah takes especial pride in showing off the capabilities of his men.

Most of the strangers are Russians. They have come preceded by an invasion of goods at cheap prices. Old Kabul bazaar is changing already. There are foreign agents to be seen closeted together with the old Afghan shopkeepers, and as a result of these confabulations, there are to be seen sparkling and ridiculously cheap foreign clothes and ornaments in the shops, while the shopkeeper himself has difficulty in hiding the fact that he has recently acquired considerable wealth.

New buildings have gone up in Kabul City, near the ten bridges. They are on Western lines, and one day there is heard the click of a new machine, that taps all day and well into the night. It is at first a mystery. Then, to the surprise of the populace, a young clerky individual can be seen in the biggest store, writing with an automatic machine.

Strange times, these, and strange portents abound in

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Kabul. But the young soldier, scorning everything but his beloved Army, throws himself again into military affairs.

The Turks are in Kabul too. Fine soldierly men, wearing very prominently the star and the crescent, very religious always, to impress the religious Afghan. They seem particularly interested in the Army, and if the truth be told, Amanullah is secretly flattered by their attention, and consumes eagerly the crumbs of praise which are often thrown to him from these impressive, upright men from a martial race of the same religion.

They do not seem to co-operate very well with the Russians. Their legations, unofficial as yet, are at the opposite ends of the city. There have already been brushes between the diplomats, but it is difficult for a mere soldier to find out the true intentions of that wily old fox, the Amir Habibullah.

Not even to his son does he entrust the secrets of his heart. Russia or England, Turkey or Germany? He will not say where his heart lies, and from his demeanour it is impossible to tell whether he has been impressed by the religious companionship of the Turks, the cold efficiency and financial promises of the Teutons, the dignity of the British, or the softly wheedling tactics of the Russians.

Even a soldier, however, has his own ideas. There was at that time bred in the heart of Amanullah a burning flame of nationalism which was not to be found in the heart of any other Afghan. He saw the flatterers of other lands, and he heard the soft arguments of many nationalities. He learnt how beneficial it would be for Afghanistan to link her fortunes with the Germans and the Turks. He heard how imperative it was that treaties should be made prejudicial to the British, and how it was essential

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for preference to be given to the neighbours on the north, the Russians.

The result was to kindle in his heart a determination that Afghanistan should forge for herself a future independent of the favours of others. The soldier was speaking. The Afghan, bred in the tradition of heroic self-reliance, was forming his future to the exclusion of the diplomat.

But he did not obtrude his views against the stern and strong silence of his father. Habibullah went his own way, scheming and plotting. He gave nothing away, and he was as much a mystery to his courtiers as he was to the delegates of all the Powers who had suddenly seemed to realise how great a prize was the friendship of this wild, strategical "buffer" state in the East.

"Afghanistan for the Afghans!" The words of the old mullahs came back to him with the emphasis of a phrase learnt in childhood. He, at any rate, would not pander to the conceits of others. There was all the more reason, because of the international flattery at the Court, to ensure the discipline of the Army. He dreamed of guns, aeroplanes, convoys of motor transport wheeling across the great parade grounds. He saw in his ambitious imagination the armies of the Afghan nation, no longer split into factions, but united as they had never been united before.

He saw the hillmen massing on the plains, not in the irregular, guerrilla bands of other days, but in a compact, mobile force. He saw himself as head of a great fighting nation, with the history of many campaigns in their blood, but strengthened with the improvements of modern warfare.

The world could teach Afghanistan. These men who came from over "the Black Water," with their motor cars and their modern machines, could be used without

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trading on the ignorance of his countrymen. They could supply rifles that would put to shame the Afghan-made carbines of great expense and short lives. They could introduce artillery which would make the Afghan Army a power in international armaments.

Thus he dreamed, but there was little encouragement for his ideals. He found sluggards at headquarters. He found men in high places whose lives were concentrated on the need of forcing the last penny from Government contracts. He found bribery on a scale never before known in history. He found apathy in his father.

“The Afghans have always been like that,” said his father. “You can never rid us of corruption.”

The infamous saying was quoted in his face :

“Afghan, Afghan, be imam, be imam !”

“Fie, fie, faithless Afghan !”

He did not lose faith.

.

Then came war.

The rumours were right, then. The whole world was at war. The British were in, the Turks were in, the Germans and the Russians were in. News came over the passes, strangely divergent news according to whether it came from north or from south. Travellers came down from the north with the tales of whole continents under the grip of the war fever. Stories came up from the south telling how India was depleted of armed men, all gone over the Black Water.

Perhaps it was then that Amanullah, reviewing his troops and finding them good, looked down toward the south, and thought of the lush valleys and the wealthy cities of India. Weak, luxury-loving people down there, if the tales from the caravans were true. Once you got

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past the northern region, and through the Khyber Pass, there were undefended cities to be sacked, great grazing plains to be occupied, cattle and crops such as were never seen in his own dear but cruel land.

The promises of German agents were specious. The Turks were their blood-brothers, and there could be no harm in taking the side of their brothers in the Moslem faith.

War, and his people were made for war !

But old Habibullah said nothing, and parleyed day by day on equal terms with all the delegates from all the Powers. He would turn his eloquent hands palm upwards and flutter them from the wrist to depict his state of mind. He would smile, and agree with everyone who came to see him, and give nothing away. He would bargain, just for the love of bargaining, and his interviewers would go away without an inkling of what he wanted to do, what he meant to do, what he could do.

He was playing the old Afghan game, highly unsatisfactory to his son. He was sitting on the fence, greatly pleased with the importance that Afghanistan had suddenly gained in international affairs. He curbed his son's impetuosity.

But, secretly, the Amir had given his word to the British.

"Have confidence," he had sent down as a verbal message to India. "Trust in the word of an Afghan. You must not be surprised if I appear to be against your interests. But, you know, I deal with 'kittle cattle' . . ."

He kept his word. The depleted defences of the North-West Frontier were never harassed. Up in Kabul he played with the schemers as the schemers hoped to play with him. He knew his "kittle cattle."

But it cannot be imagined that the forced inactivity



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pleased his son. Amanullah stamped in impatience while he saw, below the Khyber Pass, a great treasure going begging. A testing time at last ! A chance for his own generalship and the valour of his own men !

Even at that time there must have entered his mind the thought : “ If I were Amir. . . .”

CHAPTER II

A RULER'S DEATH, AND A YOUNG MAN'S IMPULSE—LIFE WITH
THE AFGHAN ARMY—SPORT IN THE WILD HILLS—
KABUL, COCKPIT OF THE EAST

DURING the World War, Amanullah learnt much. He was at the age that can see world events in their proper perspective. He was twenty-four, possessed a clear, determined brain, and was beginning to look at history from a slant peculiarly his own.

Every phase of the War ; every breach of faith and every betrayal of national characteristic ; every feat of arms or triumph of patriotic fervour ; all found a niche in his brain for his future guidance.

Nothing swerved him from his path of violent nationalism. Even when his critics were at their busiest, it was never suggested that he had sinned in any way save against the laws of tact. He did all for his country. He believed in himself and his countrymen. Amanullah's energy and ambition were entirely guided by good intentions.

It was not an edifying spectacle that he saw over half the world. The timid admiration for all things modern, which had been growing in his breast, suffered a slight setback when he saw how modern nations conduct their squabbles. His military mind reeled at the facts of a slaughter which put even the old massacres of his country's history to shame. He realised that he would never attain a position equal in any respect to that gained by the Powers across the sea, if universal

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destruction were the paragon. But more and more as the news of the War reached his ears, he was intent upon showing to the world that Afghanistan could not be regarded as the pathetic little "buffer-state" towards which the Great Powers could show a benevolent tolerance.

This period was the last of any length during which Amanullah was to have the leisure for his further education. He made the best use of it. In particular he studied the policy of his father. He knew already, to his disgust, the vacillation and intrigue which distinguished Habibullah's foreign policy. He was already disappointed in the stand which, on the surface, the old man was taking towards the Powers whose representatives daily sought his favours.

Amanullah was too young then to understand the Eastern policy of sitting on the fence. An hereditary quality in Eastern lands, somehow it seemed to have been left out of his constitution. Impatience ruled him. He was a man of action. He counted display and braggadocio as a strong feature in the life of a nation. He loved to read of the finery and chivalry of the old Persian armies. Diplomacy, he thought scornfully, played a small part in their lives. They were fighting men.

Old history absorbed him. He read that the Afghans may be the Lost Tribes of Israel. He read of Afghana, who helped his father build the Temple at Jerusalem. Legend had it that when misfortune befell the children of Israel beside the Nile, Afghana trekked with his sons to the hills of Ghoor, and thence far north to the shadow of the Hindu Kush. He read yet another theory that held Mahomed responsible for summoning the chief of the refugees to hold the faith of Islam in Asia against the growing forces of infidelity.

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And, probing among the ruins of old Kabul, he rediscovered the traces of ancient civilisation which proved that Kabul figured in history fully two thousand years before Julius Cæsar brought his legions to Albion. Ariana was the name of the wild, inhospitable country in those days, and it is remarkable that among the names of the provinces constituting the region so named, there was one named Gandhara, changed only by an initial letter to-day into the Province of Kandahar.

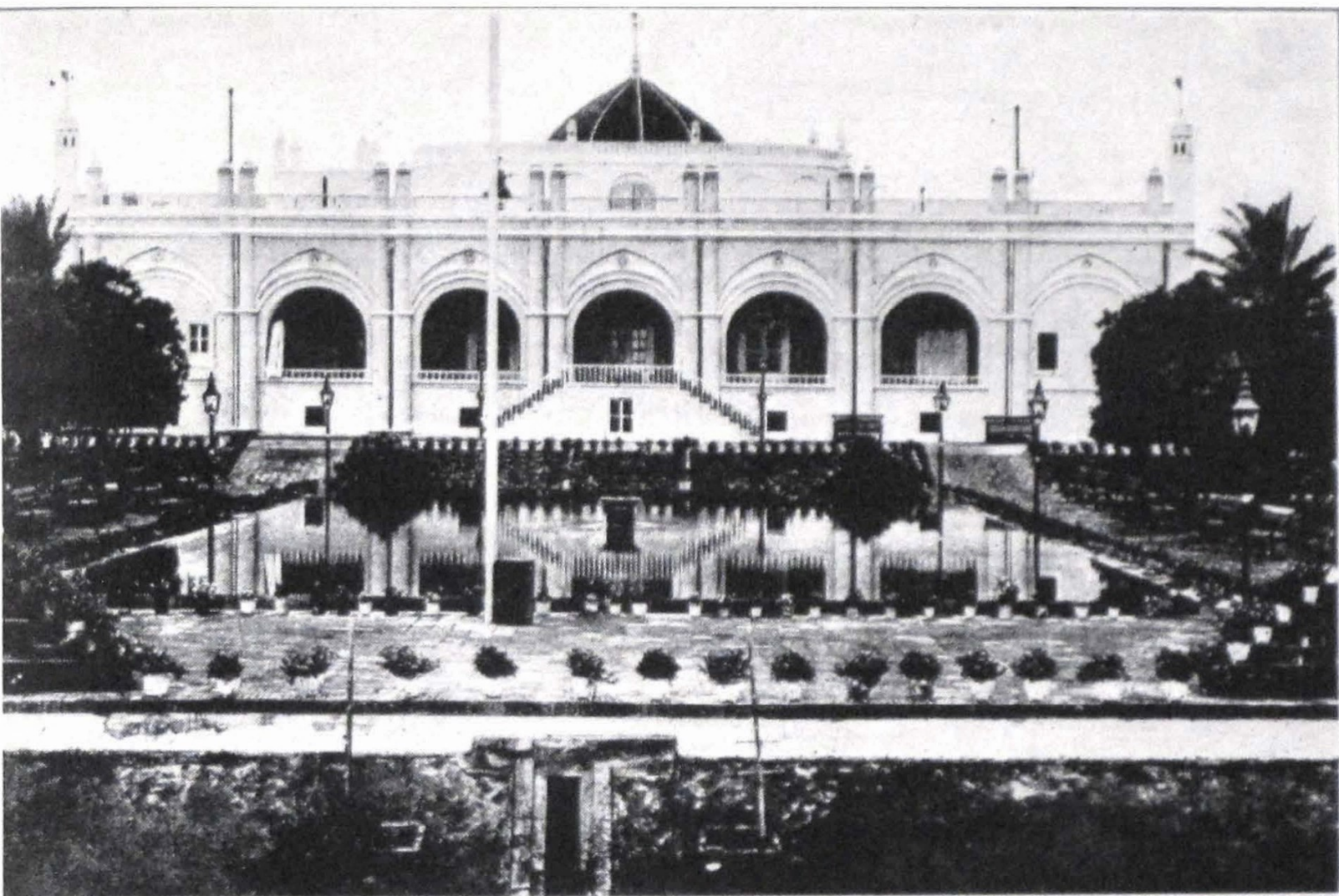
Alexander's name figured largely. There are ruins to-day, in the district which must have been the scene of his triumphs, which bear his name. Herat is named after him. Occupying that city, he advanced upon Kabul from the north-west, Kandahar falling to him and giving him the last link in a circle round the capital.

In the north, the point where Alexander forded his legions across the Oxus is still remembered by his name. This ford is regarded as of major strategical importance, and when he had conquered thus far, we can imagine that the Kabulis had terror in their hearts at the approach of one whose fighting fame was stretching across the world.

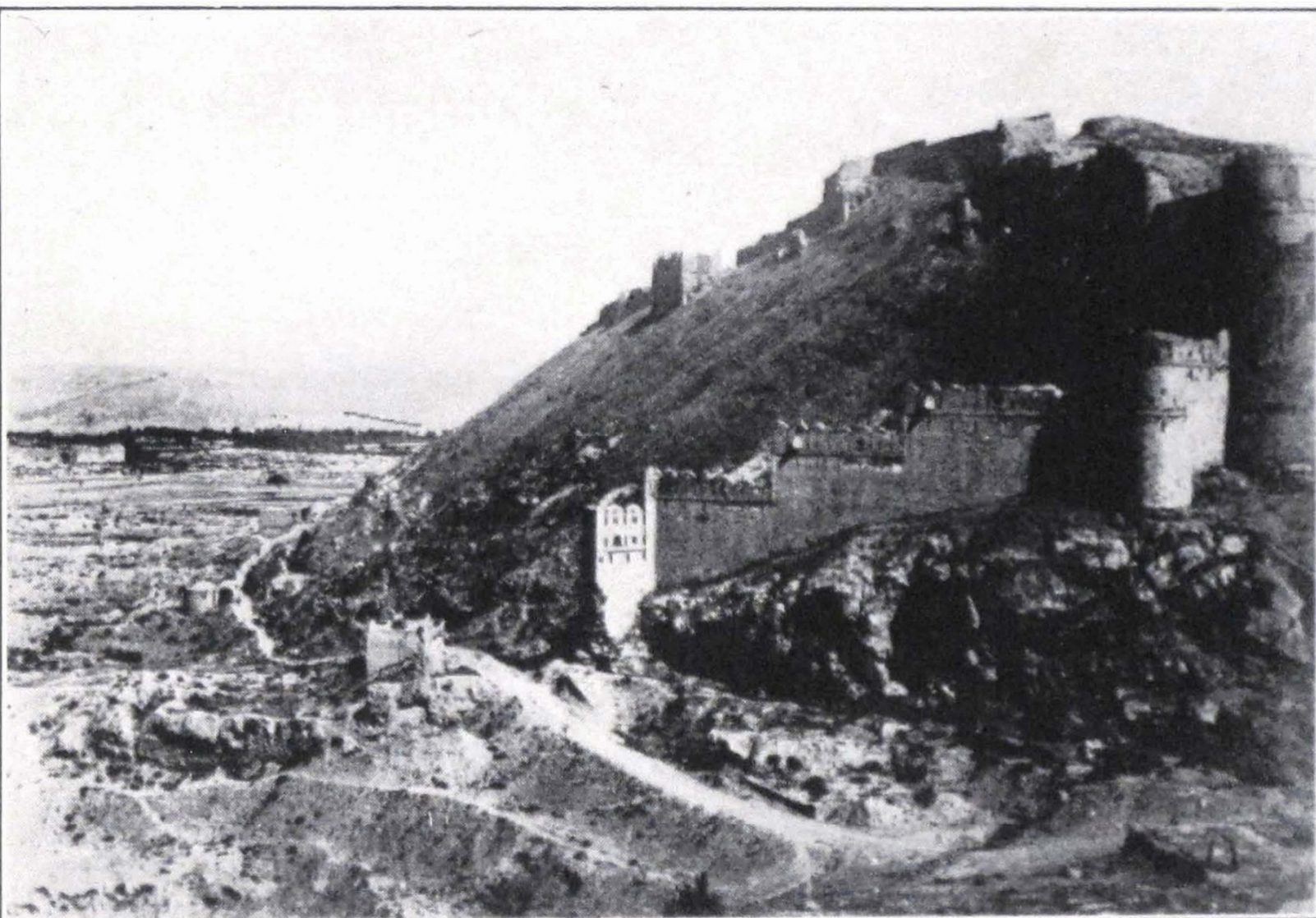
The guide, showing Amanullah the famous ford, would point to certain marks in the rocks, as he does to this day, averring that these are the footprints of Alexander, and represent the key position to the whole of the East.

Kabul fell, after a night when Alexander gazed down from the hills, from a point where to-day the motor cars of foreign visitors sweep through a defile along a modern if dangerous road. Then he struck, and yet one more bloody chapter was written in Kabul's history.

But India, the goal of his ambitions, was not to be Greek, for Alexander died, and his successors, forgetting the importance of the Kabul valleys as their base,



AMANULLAH'S WINTER PALACE, JALLALABAD.



BALA HISSAR, THE OLD FORT OUTSIDE KABUL
Scene of medieval and modern battles.

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bartered what little the hordes had conquered for the price of five hundred elephants.

We can picture the young Amanullah poring over these records of his nation's history. He has perhaps been out on a hunting trip, and has made his way back to camp only when dusk has fallen and the majority of his men have pleaded their physical exhaustion. He has tired them out, racing over the plains on his horses, and scrambling over the rocks after ibex. He is at the camp-fire, reading in old Persian by the glimmering light of the flames, while the chill mist comes down on the hills with that suddenness which distinguishes the hilly regions of the East.

His men lie unconscious in sleep. Still he goes on reading. And after a time lifts his eyes from the page and dreams of his future.

What did he aspire to? There was an even chance of his being Amir. He was not the eldest son, but the rules of direct accession do not always apply in Eastern countries. . . .

He had even chances with his brother, whom he held in the contempt common in the soldier for the diplomat. He had even chances with the next strong man who might be convenient and able to jump into the breach.

Did he wish to be Amir? Probably not, if kingship meant the age-long wrangling, the intrigue, and the chicanery of present-day life. He could not, he felt, maintain the pace at Court. He would hanker for his parade grounds, for his personal touch with the Army, and for the wild hills from which his men were recruited.

In many moments of reverie he thought of the backward condition of his people. Even the tenets of the religion which were taken for granted in his country,

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came up for review in his vigorous brain. The women, for instance. Few dared to brave the wrath of Allah and the temporal disapproval of the mullahs by thinking freely about the *purdah* system. Few questioned the right of men to imprison women all their lives in the enveloping cloak of custom. But Amanullah did.

He thought of their starved lives in the upper rooms. Their starved minds, fed by an occasional glance through the lattice into a courtyard. He thought of the debasement of their bodies in the name of religion. He pictured their agonies under the rules that went for medicine at the most critical time of their lives.

These thoughts were secret. Amanullah was from that moment a rebel. Trained by the mullahs, he yet dared to question their right to dictate the physical and material welfare of the nation. He must have been startled by his own thoughts, when in the sober light of day he passed in review the strange revolutionary theories which had occupied him by the camp-fire.

He even found reason to despise caste. He revolted against the laws which made men separate one from another in holy distaste. He was applying common sense to the Koran. He could have been shot for it.

But none guessed his thoughts. None wondered what was taking place in the mind of the young soldier who had already gained fame in every province in the country. None knew his burning ambition. He was not looked on as even a possible future Amir. The prophets took their searching eyes no further than Court circles, and gossip, seeing the old Habibullah still strong and vigorous and cruel, guessed that when the time did come, then his place would be taken by some similar cunning schemer close to the throne.

Nasrullah, brother of Habibullah, and just such

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another artful old fox, held the strongest of the betting. He laughed at all the Amir's cruel jokes, approved all his actions, and showed himself as cunning at the old game of diplomacy and time-wasting palaver.

But that time was a long way off still. Habibullah had not relented a scrap, during the last ten years or so, in his playful habits. Only the other day, rumour said, he had played a pithy joke while engaged in his equivalent of a game of chess. He was interrupted during a move. A messenger came in to announce that four hundred mutinous soldiers had been brought in from Herat. The guards awaited instructions.

"Oh—poke their eyes out," said Habibullah, without taking his gaze from the board before him.

This story is vouched for by an Englishman who was with him at the time. The sentence was carried out that same day.

When Amanullah came to hear of this and similar incidents, he wondered at such methods. He had been brought up in a hard school, and he had heard the maxim and favourite saying of his father.

"I rule an iron people," Habibullah would say, "and I must rule with an iron hand."

But Amanullah was unconvinced. Something must be wrong. He looked abroad, and though he saw pillage and slaughter on a scale unknown in history before, he saw that there were lessons to be learnt from the West which might with time be applied to the East.

Chief of the evils that he saw at Court was the universal system of corruption. There was little deception about it. It was a recognised and apparently ineradicable taint. It had gone on for so long that it had grown into custom. Every man had his price, and the wise ruler was he who raised the market and gained as great a sum as possible for his favours.

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Every official position was farmed out. Every department had its parasites. Every tax on the people was paid chiefly to the heads who had bought their titles and meant to recoup themselves as rapidly as possible. Very few could stand out against the system. It had eaten into the heart of the nation, and was as established as the need for eating and drinking. The soldiers in his Army paid annual sums to their corporals for protection from imposition. Generally speaking, corporals paid levies to their sergeants to keep their rank. Sergeants paid their senior officers, and officers had bought their titles and were forced to find interest on the investment.

So it went on in every branch of government. Nobody was immune. And against this birthright of the Afghan, only Amanullah protested. Only Amanullah thought that there was wickedness in the custom. Only Amanullah dared to say that perhaps there were other methods.

But he kept silent. Even Amanullah would not be safe against the anger of Habibullah.

The War dragged on. Almost its only repercussions in that far-off land were the redoubled efforts of the emissaries at Court to enlist the support of Habibullah and embroil Afghanistan in the War. Never before had the country played so important a part in world politics. Never before had such promises been made.

If the word had been given, Habibullah would have found his capital one of the greatest military bases in the East. He would have been harried and flattered and eased out of power. Once he had fallen to the flattery of Russia, Afghanistan would have been lost for ever—to the might of the Northern Power. Once he had retracted from his policy of general placation

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and see-saw equivocation, Habibullah would have been the last Afghan Amir of Kabul.

As the British in India came to realise that they could place more and more trust in his secret promise of strict neutrality, troops were drafted even from the northern stations of the Khyber Pass to fill up the ranks in Flanders. India was not undefended, but its defences were manned by an irreducible skeleton force incapable of resisting long attacks.

It was one of the greatest risks taken in the Great War, and its justification depended on the verbal agreement of a "faithless Afghan."

Early in the years of the Great War Amanullah married again. His bride was Souriya, of Syrian attraction, educated and beautiful. The marriage could not be expected to cause the stir that the first marriage had meant for friends and relatives, and if the truth be told the name of Amanullah was fading into the background during these days, in favour of more diplomatic and closer friends of the Court.

Little attention, therefore, was paid to the new maiden of his choice. Yet she was worth the study. She had brains—hitherto disregarded among the swains of Afghanistan as a qualification for the capture of their hearts. She had beauty. And she was willing to follow Amanullah through all the tribulations and troubles into which his boldness was bound to lead him.

Her name is curious. It has connections with Pleiades. Souriya lived up to the name. She used her beauty and tact to effect when later she was called upon to test the revolutionary ideals of her husband.

It is a pity that the Kabulis of that day did not take very much interest in the bride. She was in strict *purdah*, of course, and religiously followed every precept that the mullahs laid down for her. Nothing could have

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been alleged against her private life. Yet later she was to be cited in Kabul as the arch-transgressor against the laws of the Prophet, and as a woman who had offended against the Koran by exposing her undoubted beauties to the gaze of the common populace of Rome, Paris, London, and Moscow.

“The mystery of the East envelops her,” wrote one enthusiastic London journalist who saw her in European clothes. “She has all the wisdom of the East in her eyes, all the dignity of the East in her carriage, and yet she has inculcated the West into her speech and her manners.”

Such was the woman whom Amanullah picked to be his second wife. It was an unusual selection, but once again he proved his common sense and his judgment. Souriya was one of the most loyal heroines of this age. She followed the dictates of her husband even when her life was threatened, and exposed herself to the insults of the mob both on religious and moral grounds.

Soon after the wedding she bore him a son, a daughter in 1919, a son, Rahmatulla Khan, in 1923, and two more daughters, now aged ten and seven.

Amanullah had found a companion with whom he could share his secret. He did not treat his wife with the distant brutality common among his countrymen. He actually made friends with her! Such a thing was unknown. It was revolutionary. If he had known, old Habibullah would have said that this policy was sapping at the root of manhood. But he never knew.

The friendship did nothing but spur him on to further dreams of emancipation for women. He had read of the women of the West. They were not chattels, but companions. Even now, white women were in Kabul, unveiled and free, taking part in the social life of the city. Afghans who had been to Paris for their military

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education told him of the way white women were accustomed to walk abroad by day, and even to work in the service of their country. The news convinced him that he was on the right lines if his country was ever to take its place among the foremost nations of the world.

His teaching fell on fruitful ground. Souriya encouraged him. Both knew that they could not divulge their strange secret to the world. The mullahs would have talked of sacrilege !

But the days wore on, and as he developed his thesis Amanullah dreamed yet more often of the time when he could spread the doctrine of female emancipation. He knew he was running a risk. He knew that he was kicking against the whole religious teaching of the Moslem world. He did not flinch.

Habibullah still divided his time between the Palace at Kabul and the Winter Palace at Jallalabad. The courtiers followed him everywhere, still more pressing with their inducements to side with the northern enemy against the British. Then the Russians fell out and their place was taken by the German envoys, scared of too close an approach to India, but anxious to sow the seed of dissension against the nation that they termed the "freebooters of the Moslem faith."

Amanullah's education continued. He himself became affected with the anti-British epidemic. He learnt the laws of his country. He learnt how the Government of Afghanistan was prohibited from maintaining direct dealings with any other country. He learnt of the annual sum paid to his father's Government for the maintenance of peace. He considered this as a reward—and a paltry reward at that—granted to a small boy under a promise to behave himself.

Yet ten years before his birth there had been a day

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when Afghans had swept the plains clear of British save for the dead and the dying. At Maiwind in the year 1880, the Afghan hordes had come down like wolves upon the armed force of Great Britain. There had been no withstanding their ferocity, their bravery, and their generalship. He searched out old warriors, who, flattered and gratified, enlarged the tale of Afghan heroism until it sounded as if the stern battle, when the British had been outmanœuvred, was a tussle between forces quite disproportionate in valour.

The seed was sown. Henceforth, if Amanullah ever gained the power he wanted in Afghanistan, the frontier of India was not safe from the attacks of a trained Afghan army. At their head would be Amanullah.

It is small wonder that history went to his head. He could make no comparisons. He did not know that his old matchlocks were out of date. He did not know that modern fortresses were proof against the sword and the burning brand. He had never seen a modern first-class fighting force on the move. He did not know that personal bravery now counted for little in the science of warfare, even in his own hills. Amanullah had a swollen head—but it was mainly through his own ignorance.

Life was pleasant. For once in history, the East was in turmoil while Afghanistan was peaceful. There were minor revolts, it is true, and disturbance in the Army. But these were to be expected, and meant nothing. A few hundred soldiers shot at dawn every year. A few examples made of mutineers and robbers. Their terrible tortures, their death agonies and maimings, were all in the decree of existence in the land of an iron people.

One outburst emanated from the lips of Amanullah. It was when one of the richest jests of his father was

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being noised abroad in Jallalabad. With his usual insouciance, Habibullah had sent to their deaths a hundred or so of his erring people. Once more came the half-satirical saying from his heart : “ I rule an iron people. They need an iron rule.”

Amanullah was not content. He flung out a rejoinder, which, however, never reached the ears of his father, or the history of Afghanistan might have been changed.

“ We are a wild people,” was the reply. “ But we can be tamed ! ”

His career, looked at in its most favourable light, appears more justifiable if that saying, hushed up by his friends, is kept in mind.

There must have been many times when relations were strained between the Amir and his warrior son. Amanullah left the Court boiling with anger more than once. Some injustice done to a soldier ; some flagrant act of cruelty to a poor man of the people ; some breach of the code of honour which ruled him, even though it was the rough honour of the wild ; he had cause enough for being dissatisfied with the present régime.

Nothing was done when he denounced, in the face of his father, the graft which permeated the whole of the State. Nothing was done when he produced instance after instance of chicanery which must already have come to the notice of high ministers in the Amir's service. He fumed, and held his peace.

Perhaps Souriya curbed his growing impatience. She was more of the diplomat. She, half Syrian, knew the Afghan mind better than did her Afghan husband. Tactfully she calmed him, knowing perhaps with the wisdom which sent the London journalist into semi-hysterics, that later he would have his chance to reform the world and its evils.

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It was a period of strain for Amanullah. He was approaching the thirties, and so far only held a rank in the Afghan Army commensurate with his rank as a prince. He knew more than any other officer about the rank and file. He knew the country better than most. He knew that he had the personality to lead, and to lead as far as death. He had brain, and he was a sea-green incorruptible. He was not smug, but he was arrogant. Justice was in his heart, and ambition was in his head. Spurred by his wife, driven again by his own mind, yet he could get no further. Afghanistan seemed to him a dead country, rotting in corruption, afraid to take a chance one way or the other.

He resented the sway of diplomacy over military prowess. He cavilled at the sale of jobs which meant the control of his good fighting men. This was not the way Afghan armies went to conquer. This was never the way of valour and victory.

Habibullah said nothing. Metaphorically, he never lifted his eyes from the chessboard when his son flamed and spouted before him. "Doubtless the young man wants something," he would say. "Perhaps he is dissatisfied. Give him a province."

Meanwhile, the old Amir played the same game with the foreign envoys, playing off one against the other, rousing jealousies, pretending to grant his favours first to one and then the other, and never budging an inch from his unassailable position of assumed perplexity and doubt as to the future of Afghan policy in the War.

He was destined to see the end of the struggle without allowing his son to unsheath the steel of his Army. The nations battled themselves into exhaustion, and news came across the water that there was an end to war. The extravagances of the flattering diplomats eased off a little. To many of them, Habibullah had seemed a

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disappointing and timorous despot. They had made no headway with him. But he knew in his own heart that down in India the British were congratulating themselves on having such a faithful fellow-conspirator.

Amanullah was sad and dispirited. The object of an army was to make war. His men had disciplined themselves into something like efficiency to no purpose. The greatest chance of his life had passed. It seemed a mockery to maintain an armed force for the sole use of the parade ground and the State functions. He sulked at Court, and almost openly expressed his disapproval of his father's neutrality.

He had not long to wait.

In the autumn of 1919, Habibullah was setting off for his Winter Palace at Jallalabad. He rode through Kabul surrounded by the finery and equipage of a real Eastern ruler. His men-at-arms bore the flags and pennants of the Royal House, and costly fabric decorated the saddle-cloths of his finest horses. There were chairs for the ladies, if they tired of riding, and there were spare horses for even the most humble of his soldiers.

The officials of the Court rode with him, and behind the little procession there came numerous pack-horses carrying the books of State and the records of the Amir's Court. Little had changed since medieval times. He looked round his capital and saw that it was to his liking. It might have been a scene from the Bible, as the dust rose from under the hoofs of the cavalcade, passing into the cañon cut like a deep knife wound in the rocks surrounding Kabul.

Habibullah was looking at the capital of his country for the last time.

Amanullah would not go to Jallalabad that year. He professed pressure of work with his Army, and expressed his intention of enduring the long winter up

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in Kabul. His refusal to follow the Court just at that time was later to cause some ugly rumours. His actions, immediately after the event which caused upheaval in the country, were closely scrutinised by his enemies. But Amanullah's reasons for remaining away from the pleasant green valleys of Jallalabad, were that he was sick of the pretences of life at Court.

He even preferred the bleak winter further north. He had work to do, and he wished once more to follow his roving life in the hills. He had not the slothful temperament of the perfect courtier, even in a circle where he could command universal respect. His companions were the soldiers, and his courageous nature led his feet often into the hills, following up the tiny goat-tracks in the mountains where even the hardest of his lieutenants suffered from the biting cold and the mountain mists falling from the chill heights of the Pamirs.

But whatever his reasons, he was lucky to be in Kabul when his father was assassinated in Laghman, near Jallalabad. The blow was struck suddenly, when the world was at peace. The Court was in a fluster. The only calm man in either the winter or the summer capitals was Amanullah.

Almost without excitement, he proclaimed himself Amir. He had the confidence of power and the conviction that he was doing right for Afghanistan. He expected no opposition. It is an index to the universal respect in which he was held, that he met little obstruction.

Inayatullah, of course, was the rightful heir. Diffidently, he announced himself as the next ruler. But there was yet another claimant. This was Nasrullah, brother of Habibullah, and one of the chief schemers at the old Court. The rights of succession, however,

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were not laid down, and though in the past the eldest sons of the Amir were usually strong enough to press their claims to rule, at other times the man who was counted "most suitable" stepped into the position.

Inayatullah did not persist long in his claim. It needed only slight persuasion from Nasrullah to frighten him into joining forces and supporting his uncle's claim against that of Amanullah. Perhaps he feared his younger brother too much to be in the position of ruler. He knew that Amanullah would always be a thorn in his flesh, and a slightly contemptuous observer of him as Amir. Far better, therefore, to help Nasrullah into the position, and live thereafter in the sunshine of his favours, without responsibility and without danger.

Amanullah's answer to this was brief and to the point. From Kabul he sent a sneering message down to the self-elected Amir.

It was signed: "Amanullah, Amir of Afghanistan."

In pithy terms it reminded Nasrullah and Inayatullah of the actual position. "The new Amir, Amanullah," it suggested, "has taken over control of the Army. He has been received with every demonstration of affection and popularity. He has seized the Treasury. He has in his possession the gold vaults and the Palace. He has uttered a Proclamation throughout the Northern Territory, and he has noted with gratification that his succession is according to the wishes of the people."

There was no reply. Nasrullah knew that he spoke with words of power. The Army was solid in Amanullah's support. He was feared as much as he was admired. And rather than tempt Providence, Nasrullah allowed his claim to drop.

The trick had been done. Without the letting of blood, Amanullah had realised his ambition. It had been sooner than he had expected, and it had been

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easier. He had been helped by the circumstance of his being in Kabul while every other possible claimant was in the south. There were further inquiries into the facts of the assassination, and it was ultimately unanimously agreed that it was the work of a fanatic. Possibly foreign agents had inspired the act. Probably there were many ready to strike. At any rate, the Amir was dead, and there could be little hope in pressing curiosity too far. Investigation was a profitless pastime, and life, even the life of a ruler, was cheap.

And it was at this time, while signing his name for the first time before the title of Amir, that Amanullah made up his mind that at last his Army would be tested in the field.

Longingly, and with a fire leaping in his heart, he looked down upon India. . . .

CHAPTER III

AMANULLAH LOOKS SOUTH—A SOLDIER TRIES AN AFGHAN
TRICK—THE SECOND AFGHAN WAR—BATTLE IN THE
PLAINS—THE FIRST AFGHAN KING

IT was then, when power had come suddenly and unexpectedly under his strong hand, that the true character of Amanullah showed itself.

Only his secret self knew the test before him. Only he would be the judge of his actions. Those fine words and sentiments which had inspired him as a critical onlooker could be translated into facts. He was now in the position to set in motion the ideals which had been born in his heart.

Yet he could conveniently forget them if he so wished, and revel in power that seemed unassailable. They need not trouble him any more than high ideals had troubled his predecessors. He could readily dismiss them as the outpourings of a jealous mind, and the criticisms of a zealot who never thought to put them into practice.

His sole confidante had been Souriya, a woman who might forget those ideals fairly easily in the pleasures of the Royal Palace. But very soon it was to be seen that the enthusiasms of the young Amir were to be translated into action which was to put Afghanistan once more through the fires of warfare, bitter and costly.

Before that happened, many of the highest-placed officers and officials of the old Court were to regret the change from an old and comfortable régime. They were summarily taken to task for their past practices

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of corruption. They were invited to explain forthwith their methods of conducting State business. Their weak pleas, based on the traditions of their forerunners, were dismissed with short consideration. They were ousted without even the salvation of their dignity. The new régime was to start afresh, and they were the first casualties.

Amanullah was ruthless. He would not listen to any of the specious excuses that came readily to the lips of those who had offended his sense of rigid correctness. In vain did they call history to their aid, and show that never in the memories of men were Afghan Government departments conducted without the evil of mass bribery and deceit.

The new broom swept clean. The sweepings were not even permitted the luxury of complaint. There were mutterings and rumours of dissatisfaction. They were kept secret, however, a compliment to the respect in which Amanullah's strength and ruthlessness were already held. And, in any case, the common people could easily be persuaded to applaud the demise of a despot, even though they had grown cynically accustomed to one tyrant giving place only to another more grasping and more dishonest.

Amanullah's nominees, however, were of a new type. It was evident, at any rate, that they had not purchased their positions in the open market. They were young men, recruited from the soldiery. They were expected faithfully to follow the ideals of their leader, and it cannot be doubted that some herculean efforts were made in Kabul at the time to maintain a moral code very different from that at any time in past history.

The posts of importance in education, the collection of taxes, the police, foreign affairs, and domestic matters were all handed out to the chosen of Amanullah. Though

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nominally they were put in the charge of Ministers, at no time in the history of Afghanistan had there been more direct and closer control from the Amir. Amanullah left no doubt about it. He was to be more than Amir. He was to be ruler, keeping his finger on every department, and swift in his criticism if it were called for.

The strain was terrific among a people accustomed to the old Eastern game of graft. There were many disappointments, and many gloomy shakings of the head among the old campaigners in the profitable fields of civic corruption. The old rich contractors presented themselves before the new Ministers with their old promises and their accustomed offers. They would bring into use their wheedling voices and their suggestive expressions in the old way of the East. They had goods to sell to the Government. They had contracts to be completed. Surely the Minister knew that there could be a little profit for both contracting parties, a little margin that both could share ?

It was an affair between gentlemen of the old school, of course. Nothing need appear on the books. Not a whisper need spread that a Minister was performing his task with considerable financial advantage to himself. Otherwise, how could a conscientious servant of Afghanistan live ? Surely he deserved something better than honour, itself unquoted in the open market ? It had always been so, and Afghanistan had prospered. Why not now ?

So went the arguments, and those of his Ministers who resisted these temptations were among the most valuable of Amanullah's henchmen. They were not in the majority. However carefully he probed into the private lives of his servants, there were always many cases which evaded his search. There were whole

schools existing on the pay-roll which were in fact products of the imagination. They received an annual grant from the Government for their maintenance, and the most fanciful figures were prepared showing the daily attendance of the scholars, their names and ages, their progress, and their back-slidings. On paper, it would appear that the rural population of Afghanistan was being dragged out of the slough of ignorance. In actual fact one or two influential officials of the Education Ministry were drawing fat allowances from the Government grants paid for the upkeep of these non-existent scholars, so seriously pictured as studying the three r's in every village in the hills.

Amanullah could not be expected to find out every detail of the mass bribery system that affected the whole State like a canker growth. He was resisting nature. Every benevolent law made for the improvement of his people gave further chances for the corrupt. On paper, they thrived. On paper, there was beginning the greatest emancipation movement ever staged in the East. On paper, there were the figures and the details, showing hundreds and thousands of little children bending their heads over the Persian copy-books day after day. In actual fact the country people were being fleeced of high taxes for the support of cunning old rascals in Kabul who revelled in the invention of new details to enrich their pockets.

The new Amir was not always deceived. When he put his finger on a definite case of corruption, punishment was swift and severe. He instituted the death penalty as the automatic punishment for an offence against the State. Even that threat did not persuade the artful deceivers into abandoning the lucrative practice.

One story shows the amazing lengths to which these parasites would go to retain their positions of trust.

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Amanullah was touring, and in the intervals of hunting and trekking into the furthestmost parts of his domain, would combine business with pleasure by paying surprise visits to the local schools which existed so bravely on the official reports.

This inconvenient probing into the villages, and the testing of the written reports, had to call for the cleverest counter-move by those who were responsible for the nation-wide graft. But there was money to spare if he could be deceived a little longer. And there is a supposedly true instance of how he was preceded on one of his tours by a small cavalcade of young Afghan scholars, who appeared in numerous villages as local products, busy with their noses to the textbooks, while a staff of schoolmasters were kept ready to take on the task of appearing as local shepherds of the flock.

Often enough the class would only be arranged just in time for the arrival of the Amir. The schoolmaster would be flurried and nervous. The children would be arranged in a new order, lest the keen-eyed and enthusiastic Amir might recognise a "local" devotee of learning whom he had noticed some hundreds of miles away, engaged in a similar task.

But the ruse worked for a time. The tour was concluded without Amanullah learning of the trick. He had satisfied himself as to the genuineness of at least some of the Education Ministry's reports. And the danger was over for the rich officials.

Such a story, whatever its foundation of truth, would seem to match well the cynicism of the Afghan, his love of intrigue, and his fondness for that richest of all jokes, a successful trick on authority.

It was the same with the new Customs laws and the contracts for the Army. According to Amanullah's estimates, the Customs duties should be bringing into

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the Treasury an annual sum sufficient at any rate to pay for the education scheme without severe recourse to extra taxation. The goods of foreign nations were already to be seen flooding the bazaars of Kabul, coming in on the crest of that wave of commercial pioneering which followed the Great War. The bazaar was becoming modernised. All the products of America, France, and Italy could be bought from the native dealers. The native handicraft men were complaining that they were deprived of a livelihood by the mass-production methods of foreigners. Goods were cheap, even after paying for entry into the country, and dealers were making huge profits by pandering to the vanity of the new public.

Customs duties on these goods should have amounted to a sum easily capable of financing a large proportion of the education policy. The fact remained that they did not. And Amanullah bent his head over the official records with a new severity and determination.

The reports were immaculate. At every frontier post, the local officials merely suggested that the great proportion of imported goods were being introduced at some other gate of Afghanistan. They had had a slack time. Here were their records, and here was their contribution to the general fund. They tallied exactly. Amanullah was up against the cleverest system of dishonesty in the world.

He must have known then the strength of the system which he was endeavouring to kill. He must have understood then the apathy of former Amirs to tilt against the stubborn bulwarks created by generations of skilled crooks. He must have wondered whether it was all worth while, this reform campaign. But even when he had been in the depths of despair, when he had finally decided that there was no one he could trust in

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the whole of his State, there would come afresh a new determination to cleanse the structure of his Government. His punishments became more severe. His distrust of all and sundry became more deeply rooted. He prosecuted his inquiries yet deeper into every coupling and joint of the State machine, working, on the surface, so methodically. He knew now that its easy run depended on the oil of graft which had flowed for so many years.

But he was not concerned only with domestic affairs. He retained his ambitions. His national pride and arrogance had increased. And it was not long after he had risen to the Amir's throne that he began to show himself arrogant and slightly offensive to the British who ruled across the formidable barrier of the Khyber Pass.

The British were never in doubt as to the character of the new Amir. They knew that trouble might be expected, now that their good friend and ally, Habibullah, was gone. Therefore, when there were sundry suspicious movements among the foothills on the Indian Frontier of Afghanistan, arrangements were made to prepare for the worst in that delicate portion of the world.

These suspicions were justified when there appeared one morning, on the neutral side of the Afghan Frontier, the resplendent figure of the Afghan War Minister, Nadir Khan, later to be King. Such conduct was without precedent. The British military authorities in Peshawar were outraged. The sacred spirit of the carefully drawn Frontier lines had been violated. And Nadir Khan was asked for an explanation.

He was indignant. He was inclined to be abusive. He, a Minister of Afghanistan, was equally aware with the British as to the sacredness of the Frontier rights.

But could not a conscientious and high-minded

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Afghan gentleman concern himself privately with the welfare of a relative in a village of the hills ? Was he not to be allowed to inquire into the circumstances of this relative's education, his future, and his prosperity ?

Surely the honourable British military authorities were inclined to be over-suspicious ? Surely they were forgetting their courtesy to the envoy of a nation that had befriended them by benevolent neutrality during the War ? Fie on their suspicious natures !

He got away with it. He had spoken like a true Afghan, always equipped with the most disarming, the most naïve, and the most transparent of excuses. He went back over the Frontier, with a good idea in his mind of the depleted forces and the exhausted defences of the British war machine on the North-West Frontier.

Amanullah heard his Commander-in-Chief's report with impatience and a new determination. His eyes shone as his envoy told him of the relaxed discipline and the revulsion from war that permeated the British in India. He heard of men sick and tired of the sound of warfare ; of a feeling of security held by the highest military advisers to the Government in India.

Then Amanullah made up his mind. His dream was coming true. At last, the armies of Afghanistan, trained and disciplined as they had never been before, would test their steel against the might of England with a better chance of success than ever in history.

He readily found an excuse. It was that his nation was hampered by the condition laid on his Government that foreign relations with other countries could only be conducted through the British authorities in India. Surely, he persuaded himself to think, his father had, by his conduct in the late War, gained the right for Afghanistan to be free to treat on more equal terms with other nations ?

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He stirred up a spirit of indignation among his Ministers. He egged himself on to smart at the insult which he considered he, as Amir, was continually offered.

If the truth be told, there was some justification for the reports of Great Britain's military weakness in the north of India. It was not so noticeable as to justify Amanullah's hope, but there were grains of truth behind the assumption. Indian troops had just returned from France, but the British drafts, which according to programme should have set sail for India on the usual annual programmes, were being delayed, largely through the muddle of demobilisation at home and the difficulty of hurrying back to normal after the great upheaval. It was inevitable that the spirit of the times should be one of relaxation, and revulsion against warfare. The Army was resting on laurels gained through four hectic years.

War on the Frontier was the very thing to be avoided. It was fortunate, therefore, that the wish to avoid war did not obscure the fact that war was probable. If military advisers had not suddenly awoken to the fact that Amanullah was determined and dangerous, there would have been many more chapters of bloodshed following on his accession to the Amir's throne.

Events moved rapidly. Within a few weeks there could be no blinking the fact that intentional insults, and offences against the Frontier laws, were being offered. Reports were frequent of armed bodies of men moving just the other side of the Frontier. At any moment the first blow might be struck. Amanullah, at this crisis in his life, was calm and determined, happy in the knowledge that at last he was to see his military machine moving.

He had counted, with confidence, on the aid of the

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hundreds of thousands of irregular troops, banded into small forces, which inhabited the hills. They were always ready for war. Their lives were taken up with feuds and domestic squabbles which fitted them admirably for being considered as a reserve force. They were never more pleased than when they could forget their private disagreements to unite against a common foe. Their objects were the acquisition of loot, more than national pride or arrogance, and their highest motive in taking up arms for their country was the possibility of adding more laurels to their family tradition.

They were fighting men born and bred. They knew their hills, and could survive with the minimum of provision for their comfort. They were tireless, fearless, and elusive. They did not respond well to discipline, but they were unsurpassed in fast-moving warfare in which personal bravery counted as much as military efficiency.

Within a few days reports received in India justified the gloomy forebodings of war on the Frontier. It was the worst time of the year for white soldiers. The sun beat down ferociously on the bleak hills, giving no cover. At no time in the last hundred years had British commanders been less enamoured of the prospect of a campaign. Yet here were the facts.

Amanullah moved a picked force of 2000 men down to Dacca, a few miles from the barbed wire of the Frontier leading to the Khyber Pass. There was soon another force of 2000 men at Khost. Another 1500 were at Kandahar. And early in May British pickets at Landi Khana were in a short and sharp affray with an irregular band of Afghan hillmen who had sneaked over the Border.

It was a bad time for Great Britain. The sharp-



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shooters were wily and difficult to locate. When a British force moved up to Dacca to engage with the enemy and press the matter to a conclusion, they were marched through a veritable inferno. It was risky to move men anywhere at that time of year. The sufferings endured during even an early morning march were sufficient to make such a course a rash expedient. Yet troops were soon at grips with the main force of the opposing army, and on the 3rd of May there was a battle at Dacca which showed that not yet could the personal heroism and endurance of undisciplined troops from the hills survive against the modern war machine.

Two hundred Afghan soldiers were killed in this first battle, while the British lost only twenty-two men. It was a bitter lesson for Amanullah. For some time it was feared that the ambushes and enfilading of the irregular troops would form the chief menace to the life of the column, but with excellent strategy their efforts were discounted, and to Amanullah there came the first blow to vanity.

He was not finished yet, nor was a single battle proof against the ingenuity of Afghan tactics. For the British found themselves menaced by a plot, really Afghan in its secrecy and intent, within their very gates. This was no less than a conspiracy engineered by the Government official in Peshawar. When later his actions were investigated, it was found that only by a miracle was Peshawar saved from disaster.

He was found to be the instigator of a wide plot which had flourished unknown for some time. His project was no less than a secret attack on the military station by bands of tribesmen introduced into the native city by stealth. While the regular troops were away at Dacca, an attack could be launched at their base which would effectively strangle their source of supply. The

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whole military station was to be pounced upon, the arsenal blown up, headquarters burned to the ground, and all communication destroyed, both with the punitive force and the second lines of defence down country.

The official, quietly receiving his pay as a fairly senior officer of the British service, had completed his plans in every detail. Peshawar was as good as lost, and with it the lives of several hundred British men and women. But fortunately a stroke of luck uncovered the plot before it had reached fruition. Once more Peshawar had been saved from the tribesmen, and, with its discovery, the last trick of Amanullah had been played.

The second Afghan War was over. The British force did not seek further engagements in that inhospitable land where so many soldiers had laid down their lives. Licking his wounds, Amanullah withdrew his troops to their bases. Dacca had been disappointing to him, and though he was fully satisfied with the conduct of his men, he had realised for the first time the might of a fully trained and superbly equipped white force. It was his first inkling of the value of strategics. He had counted on a victory without compromise as soon as a British force left its defences on their own side of the border.

He would never have attempted to force the formidable defences of the Khyber. But he had congratulated himself beforehand on the defeat of the troops who had marched across those parched plains to meet his army in their comfortable quarters at Dacca. The blow to his ambition was severe and the lesson one that would last a long time.

Still, carefully preserving the remnant of his pride, he marched back to Kabul with his old demands ready on his lips and pressed them stronger than ever before

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No troops marched to Kabul to teach him his lesson. Departing from precedent, probably wisely, the British in India decided against that almost inevitable step. As if it were in default of action to the contrary, Amanullah was granted his wish to conduct foreign relations via London. It must have surprised him that the concession should have been granted so readily. In truth, it meant little to a nation whose chief concern at the moment was centred in Versailles.

Amanullah made the most of it. Marching into Kabul, he announced Independence !

“Afghanistan is free !” he boasted. “The great armies of my country have gained their rights as a nation. No longer are we the subject-nation of Great Britain, whose armies we met in battle on the plains of Dacca. Henceforth Afghanistan is an independent nation, ranking with the most powerful in the world !”

Such words were hardly considered as of importance while the Western nations were settling the future of the world in a palace on the outskirts of Paris. . . .

The stir caused by the end of the War, however, was adequately celebrated in Kabul. Gradually the affair at Dacca was magnified into a great and glorious defeat of the British Army. Nothing was too good for the soldiers ; no praise was too high for the brave and ambitious young Amir who had led his troops to victory and gained full honour for his country.

The Palace was the scene of festivities night after night. The poor of Kabul city found themselves the sudden recipients of food and money. History had been written. Everything that had been said about the young Amir, then, had been truth !

Nobody mentioned the two hundred dead left on the plains. Nobody inquired into the facts and figures of the battle. It was a famous victory, and it would be

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treason to doubt it, since if it had been defeat, then already the hated British troops would be occupying Kabul.

Afghanistan for the Afghans! The dream of the young Amir was coming true.

The populace even conspired to forget the taxes which were mounting ever higher on every head, the dues which were required to pay for the education schemes, the improvement plans, the rebuilding of Kabul, and the road programme. That must be a necessary part of the change from bondage to freedom. So be it. The people were content with their young and fearless leader.

It has been said with some truth that the absolute necessity for a leader in Afghanistan is popularity. It was indeed proved later that money is not essential. Support can be bought more cheaply with respect and fear than with money. And certainly at this period Amanullah took pains to secure himself the friendship and admiration of his people.

His bravery could not fail to impress every Afghan. He was even foolhardy, but with a purpose. One incident shows the real courage of the man, and the wisdom that dictated his acts of bravado.

The rumour reached his ears that there were men in Kabul city anxious to assassinate him. The news was indeed public property. Not a few of the elders wondered what would be the reply of the impulsive young Amir. They had not long to wait.

As soon as he heard the rumour, he sent to the garage for his open touring car.

“Drive through the old city!” he commanded.

He himself sat in the back, lounging with a smile of defiance on his face, inviting the bullet of the coward.

There was good common sense behind the action, for he knew that the tale of that drive would flash round

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the samovar shops and ripple delightedly into every corner of the bazaar. He was a hero with a brain.

But as his pressure on the exchequer grew more severe : as he forced his Ministers to proceed with yet more ambitious plans : as costs grew and swelled, and the deficit in the nation's treasury became more and more serious, the far-sighted among his advisers quaked at the omens of the future.



CHAPTER IV

PRIEST AND PEASANT—FOREIGNERS IN THE “FORBIDDEN LAND”—IN THE HEART OF “BLASTED KABUL”—THE BIRTH OF A NATION?

THEN there began a long and dire struggle with the mullahs.

Amanullah's early experience of them as his mentors will be remembered. Up to now, it has only been hinted that in his introspective moments he had found much to blame in the power invested in this “ring of the Church.” As time went on, and the mullahs found themselves more and more subjugated to his rule, it was evident that the basic differences would be sufficient to cause a real tussle between Church and State.

The mullahs had traditions behind them. They were backed by the inherent superstition and religion of the Afghan. They were supported by the pride of the Afghan in his Biblical history. And they had always been able to call upon the great mass of the people in the event of opposition, by appealing to the strong religious sentiments which animated their childlike and simple minds.

They had taken care to cement the hold they had gained on the minds of the people. By every device of mystery and spiritual bluff, they emphasised that the mullah was triumphant over his poor, sinning flock. They recruited in their aid the folk-lore and fairy tales that still lived in the age-old hills. They used their persuasive powers cleverly, and there could be found

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few Afghans, even in wicked Kabul City, to flout the great power which they wielded. That power was now challenged every day by the rising of a man who was sacrilegious enough to be modern.

The mullahs had hold of the Afghan from his first breath. They were inevitable attendants at his birth, and their ministrations were held to be invaluable for the safety and care of both child and mother. Through early life, they exercised the same supervision over the child, and took care that its mind should be well grounded in the essential tenets of the Mahomedan faith, one of the chief clauses of which was of course a spirit of true reverence for the priests.

They even insisted on taking a close part in the conduct of their flock's affairs. With a business acumen that could not have been gained solely in the service of the Church, they often proved themselves excellent prophets and advisers on purely secular affairs, and it may be taken as a certainty that such advice was not given altogether for the glory of the Lord, but to some extent for their personal financial betterment.

During the preliminaries to his marriage, the mullahs were among the closest confidants of the prospective bridegroom, and since marriage is always akin to business affairs, there were few times when the local mullah would fail to arrange for love to follow the wisest course for the pocket. And naturally enough, at death the services of the mullahs were once again in demand.

Thus it will be seen that the priests entered into the lives of the simple warrior-farmers through every stage of their progress on earth. Such close patronage and overlordship was bound to result in magnifying their own importance. The position at that time was that the mullahs held a grip on the people more powerful than the Government, aloof and always feared, and were

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quite ready to exercise that power even in the shedding of blood for the cause that they believed to be in affinity with the commands of the Prophet.

Amanullah knew all that. He had never underestimated this possible rival power as he had underestimated the fighting qualities of the British. And perhaps he knew already that eventually there would be a struggle between the power that was ordained by custom, and the new power that he wished to exercise over his people.

He had already made concessions in his conscience to the power of the Church. Never a highly religious man, he seemed to accede to the wishes of the mullahs only when he saw that course was the inevitable. He was willing to use the religious fervour of his people to support his own proposals, as he had done when he had first considered the possibility of war with the British.

Then he had stressed the religious duty of Afghans to oppose the hated *feringhe*. The mullahs had been his allies. The ruse had worked, and he had found under his command hundreds and thousands of men who truly believed that they were instructed by Mahomed to lay waste the ranks of infamy in khaki uniforms and pith topees.

An old belief of the Afridi tribesman was resurrected for the occasion. This was no less than a theory that the *feringhe* were unclean in the sight of Allah, and that the depletion of their numbers even by one caused the Prophet intense satisfaction. Hence, said the priests, the World War, which had rid the world for Allah of millions of infidels, while it was notable that the Creator had exempted from the slaughter all those who had embraced the Islamic faith. The statement may have contained some licence, only permissible by reason of its

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cause, but it worked its full effect. Allah wished that there be less *feringhe* about. It was the duty of the humble Afghan to do his bit. . . .

Even recently there have been cases of murder of white men in Afghanistan purely from religious motives. Fanatics still exist who have been biding their time for a target of one of the hated foreigners, in order to commit themselves to Allah after his dispatch, with the full confidence of heavenly approval and the assurance of Paradise in the hereafter.

The mullahs, with or without their tongues in their cheeks, were the cause.

Untouched by civilisation in one of the last "forbidden" countries in the world, the peasants gained their knowledge only through the mouths of the local priests. Travellers' tales were notoriously exaggerated, and all travellers were liars. It had therefore become the custom for the mullah of the district to become the purveyor of news for a large circle of people, and it may be taken for granted that the news did not suffer in picturesqueness by passing through his head.

He "coloured" news as cleverly as any newspaper editor.

But it was over the subject of women and their freedom that the mullahs were chiefly agitated during the first years of Amanullah's rule. The mullahs rightly believed that their power to a great extent depended on their suzerainty over the female side of the household. With a wife to preserve from the temptations of this world and the ferocity of highly-sexed neighbours, no man would willingly agree to a relaxation of the strict rules guarding his household. The dreaded prospect of a loosening of the bonds which held Afghan women, thought the mullahs, would mean a lessening of their own powers. They urged resistance to the new

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cult which was said to be spreading through India and the whole of the East. Even the Turks, fellow-Islamites, were said to be affected by the peril. Afghans, if they valued the sanctity of their homes and the chastity of their wives, would have no truck with this new and Satanic doctrine.

For already the word had been whispered. Already it was murmured in the bazaars of Kabul that strange proposals had been made in Court circles. The rumours were to the effect that women would henceforth contribute to the progress of the country in other directions than the bearing of innumerable children. Freedom was a word much heard these days. But when the two words "freedom" and "women" were mentioned in conjunction, thought the mullahs, then the danger signs were showing.

Turkish girls were already to be seen in Kabul. The wicked Kabulis had grown accustomed to the spectacle of infidel women without head coverings, but the sight of Mahomedan women in the short skirts and diminutive hats of the West caused them many qualms. There were occasional disturbances in the city. There were ugly rumours that by the force of example, an attempt was to be made to seduce the Afghan from the austerity of the *purdah* laws.

The rules of the *purdah*, of course, are well known to be indefensible on any but religious grounds. To those who have never come in direct contact with them they are incredible. Yet the basis of every one of them is the same, and it will be recalled that there can be seen in many museums the "body locks" which English gentlemen compelled their womenfolk to wear while they sallied forth to the Holy Wars.

Even more urgently are strict laws required in the East, but it can be said that the efforts to prevent com-

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plications begin earlier in the Eastern mind than they did in the consciences of the old Crusaders. For whereas the ladies of the Crusaders were prohibited by lock and chain from departing from chastity, the Eastern women are never given the opportunity of arousing even the slightest dangerous feeling in the breasts of possible admirers. And even to-day the Afghan women, on attaining the age of enticement to dangerous manhood, are enveloped in the all-concealed folds of the *purdah* far more strictly than are the women of India.

Their lives are spent behind the walls of their apartments. Their infrequent visits out of doors are confined by the walls of the garden, where they may take their evening exercise. When, rarely, they venture further afield, their *purdahs* are adjusted even more rigorously to evade a chance glimpse by a bold stranger. Perhaps the men of Afghanistan knew what they were about when in the dim days of history these precautions were invented. Hence imprisonment for the higher-class ladies of Afghanistan for all time, it seems.

Their health suffers, and their minds suffer. Their babies are born under the most dangerous conditions, for there is no relaxing of the *purdah* law on any consideration. They are still children in mind when they die. All chance of work in the service of mankind, all chance of entertainment, of recreation, is prohibited. The *purdah* is the strongest influence in the land, and through history has proved itself the one stubborn abuse which seems to resist altogether the many courageous attempts to check it.

Amanullah was planning to make the strongest assault on the system that has ever been known.

During those long periods of self-examination by the camp fires of his native hills, the thought had grown in his mind that the secret of success for the future would

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be the tearing down of the *purdah* coverings. The keystone of the future structure, new Afghanistan, would be the emancipation of women. That thought burned and persisted in his brain.

He reckoned that half the possible abilities of Afghanistan as a nation were being wasted by the continuance of the abuse. He pictured the modern country of working women, as in his land of ideals, Turkey. He had read of the great services of women in the field of medicine and education. Some day, he dreamed, he would see Afghanistan helped on the way to progress by its women.

The elementary schools were part of his scheme. Education would be the groundwork for a female revolution, egged on by the encouragement of the ruler. He would lead the East by beginning with the women. And from that moment he realised that in the future his first enemy would be the village mullah.

Gradually, as news trickled through the ranks of the Church, it was hinted that the organisation which had fed on the fat of the land for countless generations was in danger. The fear was never put into words. The Afghan can paint a clever picture, and convey his meaning by a roundabout method, without expressing his thoughts too plainly. But the impression grew throughout Afghanistan that there was secreted in the mind of the ruler some dangerous thought which meant peril for the priests. They set to work without more ado to nullify the progress already being made in the whole land.

They had plenty of excuses on which to work. First and foremost, there were the taxes. Since the tussle with the British, increased pressure had been brought to bear on the landowners. Their taxes were steadily mounting. Rumours of the poverty of the Treasury

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were going about. The Army was the apple of the Amir's eye, and it was regularly paid. The old men of the villages remembered that in the past the Army went without pay if the Treasury found itself embarrassed, and now that they had a soldier in charge it was the villager who suffered first. The tax-gatherers were more pressing than ever they had been in the past. Hardly a month went by but they came with news of a new valuation. There were new taxes on houses, and new demands made on weddings and funerals and village ceremonies. There seemed to be more taxation officers than tax-payers. Gradually the peasant began to know the other side of "reform."

There was a new education tax, and an added tax for building. There was a tax to pay for the war, and a tax merely labelled "development." Matters had never been so ill for the peasant, who did not care, in any case, how its children were educated, and had a hearty contempt for the new plans for the rebuilding of Kabul.

At the same time the peasant knew that trickery and roguery flourished as never before. It was said that fortunes were being made by every official hanging on to the skirt-tail of the Court. Every new project for the good of the State, said rumour, made a few men rich overnight.

The peasant paid, and when he could not, suffered the annexation of his land in the cruel winter.

The mullahs found their task easy. Without revealing their hand, they gently swayed the peasants over to their way of thinking. They brought many an allegory into their impassioned speeches to the village crowds. They were clever enough never to say a thing outright if it could be sketched with a story or a parable. Their power was increasing, even while Amanullah sought to discredit them in Kabul.

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Amanullah's chief trouble was undoubtedly the Treasury. He found himself baulked on every side just when he wished to forge ahead with his most grandiloquent schemes. There was little use in attempting to choke the *purdah* system while he could not pay for his new alternatives to women's forced leisure. He could not conduct with severity his campaign against corruption while he was unable to pay his officers sufficiently to keep them from the temptation. Life was a vicious circle. For the moment he could not see a solution.

The Army, persuaded into the belief that they had conquered in the field against Great Britain, flattered by a dozen speeches made by their commander, had become restive and inclined to hanker for more laurels to fall easily upon their heads. Discipline was bad, now that they were no longer kept up to pitch by the inspiring example of Amanullah. The soldiers held the natural belief that they were often being robbed of their earnings by the higher officers. They, too, were not ignored by the mullahs.

Kabul itself was affected by the get-rich-quick mania which swept the world. Things were changing even here, and the old men chatting in the samovar shops would say that never in their lives had they seen matters at such a pass. There was an uncertain feeling in the air, and even the evident prosperity of certain shopkeepers and the certain prosperity of the officers in the Government posts, did not serve to quieten the fears of the old gossips,

Kabul was indeed changed. Nowadays it was not unusual to see half a dozen foreign faces in the bazaar in a walk of half the length of the dark, covered-in main thoroughfare. They were Turks mostly, and a few Russians. They were bent on business, but nobody in that mysterious city could be certain that they were not Government spies.

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Everyone was secretive. Nobody dare show that he was too prosperous. Methods of money extortion for the Government were growing more violent, and it was already remarkable how rich men disappeared, or how their houses and their shops would be ransacked in a night without a trace of the identity of the looters. Kabul, volcano of the East, was being stirred up for some new eruption.

The money-brokers, always willing to exchange the gossip of the city as they changed rupees, roubles, dollars, or English silver over their long counters, were strangely careful these days. They trusted nobody. They looked down, inscrutable, from behind their high counters, six feet above the milling crowds. Before them were their little piles of gleaming money, ready for the stranger who might have travelled from the four points of the compass to the great grain market of the East.

And of a truth, this bazaar might well be the great mart of gossip as well as the centre of cosmopolitan Eastern finance and trade. Here were sallow Mongolian faces, with long melancholy moustaches ; here were slant eyes from China, and proud pale blue eyes from Southern Afghanistan ; here were wide, cheerful faces from Japan ; heavy features and great limbs from Russia ; men of the steppes and men of the plains ; Indian traders with the faces of Moses ; cunning little rats of babus, despised and fearful, but reputed to be very rich. A strange boiling-pot of the nations of the East, harbouring the outcasts and the robbers of half a dozen Eastern nationalities. Every man carried arms, from the long rifle across the Afridi's broad shoulders to the knife hidden in the sleeve of the Chink.

As great a divergence was there too, in the garb of these families of the East. The Kabuli himself wore

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loose flowing clothes and a great loose turban with one end falling on to his shoulder. The coolie class wore little hats, and the Turks, those few who came with the gait of conquerors into the commercial centre, wore prominently the crescent on a field of red fez.

One end of the Pathan's turban stuck up like a cockade, and the other hung down his shoulder, ready to be taken in his teeth if he saw an officer of police, ready to screen his eyes in a dust-storm. The Mongolian beggar wore a round dark brown hat, and his rags trailed in the mud of that desolate street of strange men.

All around were the noisy dramas of Eastern buying and selling. In the actual thoroughfare, donkeys and mules and skeletoned ponies struggled and bumped their way through. "Kabadar! Kabadar!" yelled the men who tended them. "Make way, make way!" And with a continued shouting for room, obeyed by none, the merchandise of all the East would pass.

Here was the base of the camel caravans. They would start in the spring from Kabul, as soon as the snows had melted on the lowlands. Slowly they would make their way down to the Khyber Pass, the leading camel ambling down a route remembered from the year before.

The route would not follow the road. That was for modern transport, and encircled the hills with many a detour to save a rocky defile or a sharp ascent. But the route the camels took was two thousand years old, and crept down the middle of the valleys, defined by an age-old track that had been marked as plainly when Alexander used it for his beasts and his men-at-arms.

As far as the Khyber, the caravan would be accompanied by outriders, sturdy scouts who kept watch and ward for possible attacks by brigands. Their long rifles would be always ready. Their keen eyes, or their sense

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of impending danger would warn the defenders of the precious skins and furs that they must prepare for sudden attack.

Then through the Khyber. The camels would amble through the gap in the barbed wire, and straight as a die through the valleys, while the new motor road curled on the flanks of the hills. British soldiers would be drilling a few hundred yards from their dignified path. The skirl of the pipes from a Highland band would cause them to flick a contemptuous eyelid.

Then to Peshawar, where the caravan attendants would spend a night in high festival in the city which is the "Paris of the East."

So down two thousand miles to Calcutta, down the Grand Trunk Road of Kipling memory. At last, the great markets of Calcutta, reached in midwinter. Strange tales these caravans could tell. They conduct to this day their business on the same principle as was the custom in Biblical times. Their owners never took money to Calcutta. They never paid for the valuable Western-made goods they brought up to Kabul the following year. All their transactions were on credit.

Sometimes finances were poor, and the merchants of Calcutta, fat, grasping Hindus, would not give them full prices for their precious skins and furs, trapped in the mountains on the Russian border. They could not pay for the loads they wished to take to Kabul. Nevertheless, they received their goods. For under the strangest agreement in the world, these traders would give their solemn undertaking to bring the price of the goods the next year. If they died, their sons or relatives would fulfil the duty. And it is said that even the suspicious and grasping *bannia* of Calcutta has never had cause to regret his trust in a Kabul caravan trader.

The camels rested the winter in the great *serais* of

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Kabul, while the traders haggled and bartered their goods away, and drank the profits in the wineshops, changing the gossip of the tracks reaching down to the Southern sea. That gossip and that relaxation had to last them a year, and they had much to tell.

“Kabadar ! Kabadar !” ran the chorus behind this great cauldron of chatter.

Laughter and song from the cafés, the sounds of revelry and occasional fights from the brothels. The clink of coins from the money-changers’ counters. The tap of iron on leather, in the great market of the cobblers, where there were stacked pyramids and hillocks of *chapplas*, brightly bound in green and scarlet. From the next market there came the sonorous note of the coppersmiths’ hammer, beating out the metal in the same-shaped vases as women carried in Kabul when England was a savage land.

The streets were lined with the beggars and the diseased. All imaginable contortions of the human body could be seen with the stunted, rotting, decaying arms outstretched for mercy. To look down the street was to see a row of them, like rotten pegs sticking out of a wall. Their shanks tucked up under them, their bodies clothed in crawling rags, they sang the old song of the ages in the East : “Bakshish, Bakshish, Hazar, Hazar . . .”

There were trunks of men, on tiny trolleys made from wooden boards and wooden wheels. They were dragged to their begging-post in the dawn, and dragged away to sleep at night. There were yellow children, blind and scaly with disease, moaning their demand for bread, for alms. There were indescribable monstrosities that drew the breath of life. Bulbous men with tremendous heads, pink leprous women with white hair, staring eyes, and gangrene black limbs. “Alms ! Alms ! Bakshish, Hazar. Bakshish !”

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But the chorus of the beggars in Kabul City was drowned by the merry laughter of the shopkeepers, the clang of the craftsmen's hammers, the cry of the muleteers, and the caravan traders.

That is Kabul, to-day and yesterday, from the days of Moses to the days when it saw revolt once more raising its head like a serpent in the very bazaar which houses such horrors.

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Amanullah went there often.

He retraced his childhood's footsteps into the inner labyrinths of the city which held such mysteries, such wealth, and such poverty. The horrors did not strike him as out of the ordinary. He accepted them inevitably as every Eastern man or woman accepts the worst inflictions of disease.

He did not notice them.

He knew the wealth of the city as well as its poverty. He knew that if danger were to come, it would come from this strange and hidden cradle of vice and intrigue. He came swaggering through the city, and he came in disguise. He flaunted his bravery in the haunt of men who, he knew, might not scruple to remove an Amir, and he slunk through the streets after information, in the guise of many of the creatures who made their way to the capital on business or on pleasure bent.

Amanullah never over-estimated the power of the throne to rule the people. He knew his people better than any of his predecessors. He was a man among men, and a warrior proved among the hardest of his men. The time was to come when this knowledge of the evil, twisted city was to be invaluable to him.

Events, however, moved slowly. For at least five years after the unhappy embroilment of his troops with

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the British forces, and the proclamation of Independence, he marked time. Ideas were still simmering in his brain, but always he found himself curbed by the shortage of funds. Small improvements and reforms were already in hand. The Palace had been enlarged. Plans were ready for roads and the construction of two new cities.

The British soon came back, this time in a magnificent new Legation under the wise charge of Sir Francis Humphrys, formerly Intelligence Officer in the Khyber Pass, and a man and soldier of calm and courageous efficiency.

Amanullah's sons grew up to emulate their father. One went to Paris to be educated in military affairs. Souriya remained his faithful confidante and devoted and loyal companion. Eventually he remembered his brother Inayatullah, and released him from gaol where he had languished for the crime of being older than Amanullah.

The trips into the mountains were becoming less frequent. Affairs of State kept him chained to his papers. He noticed with some alarm that he was growing fat. . . .

But he still kept his skill with the rifle, and on horseback. He shot sovereigns tossed up in the air. He excelled at clay-pigeon shooting. He dreamed of the plans in his head that he did not intend to be still-born.

Then he declared himself King. Even his title must be Western. . . . The mullahs noted the change with significant glances at each other.

CHAPTER V

AN ENGLISH HOME IN THE WILDS—THE EAST GOES WESTERN
—NEW IDEALS AND NEW AMBITIONS—THE RESTIVE
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THOUGH the change seems a slight one, some importance can be attached to Amanullah's sudden adaptation of his new title. It showed that his mind was ever being trained outside his country. The title of Amir was good enough for Afghanistan, where it indicated the supreme power, mightier than many a king, indeed. But it was not good enough for foreigners, thought Amanullah.

Further, he was attracted by the idea of being the first King in Afghan history. He would go down in the annals of the country. The change would indicate more sharply the division between the old and the new. It was pure vanity, but it was vanity with a reason.

To the mullahs, however, it meant changes more ominous than exercised the mind of the ruler. "Amir" had been to some extent a religious title. "King" was secular. Thus, they thought, Amanullah was robbing the old Court of a large portion of its religious atmosphere at one stroke. Such things had never been. The mullahs grew more gloomy and more afraid.

They were right in some degree. Amanullah was thinking of the foreigners. Never very religious, as has been shown, he now devoted almost his whole attention to commercial possibilities and secular details. The voice of the Imam from the Kabul mosque, sonorous and compelling as a bell, was not heard in the confines of the

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Palace. At evening, it drew the faithful still, but the King would be playing tennis. . . .

And it was at about this time that a curious change took place which could be noted by every foreign tourist who had travelled up through India and taken a look at one of the wonders of the Eastern world—the Khyber Pass.

For many years the Khyber had been included in the itineraries of the tourist bureaux of New York, Paris, and London. Round-the-world travellers, at so much the trip in floating hotels, were invited to break their journey in Calcutta, travel up to the North of India, take one swift look at Afghanistan without leaving their cars, and rush back for the evening train for Bombay.

The little adventure was well arranged, and caused brave flutterings of the heart among the hardy travellers who had accomplished it. For they had seen armed men striding down the hill roads. They had seen a “forbidden” country. They had glimpsed barbed-wire and sentries lolling on their rifles, protecting the gateway of their land. They were well pleased, and in all the drawing-rooms of the cultured and the travelled, in the Middle West of America, in the Midlands of England, and in Surbiton as often as in Minnesota, there were to be seen snapshots of high-school Sadies and suburban Sybils, wonderfully topee-ed and sun-spectacled, standing against a formidable notice-board at the end of the Khyber Pass, their background being carefully explained as “the unknown.”

That notice-board read romantically and uncompromisingly. It said, in bold black letters on a white background :

“IT IS ABSOLUTELY FORBIDDEN TO CROSS THIS FRONTIER INTO AFGHANISTAN.”

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Visitors to dinner, seeing the snapshots and concealing yawns over the endless descriptions common to travellers, uttered the usual polite noises of surprise and mild horror at the world wanderers' exposing themselves to so great a danger.

Amanullah changed even that.

Very soon the board was removed, and another, larger and more noticeable, took its place. It read, in less direct and less menacing language :

“ TRAVELLERS TO AFGHANISTAN ARE ADVISED THAT ON NO ACCOUNT MUST THEY CROSS THIS BARRIER UNLESS THEIR VISAS ARE IN ORDER.”

The anti-climax was complete. Afghanistan was open to the world. The veil of mystery was torn away. The glamour was gone. No doubt very soon the travel agencies would be advertising a glimpse of the sacred tombs of the Amirs for the benefit of world travellers, and a few well-arranged hold-ups on the rocky road from British India into the heart of Afghanistan.

There came a Proclamation from the King stating in bald terms that permission to cross the Frontier could be gained merely by the securing of a visa. Travellers were encouraged, in theory at any rate, and the new programmes for the rebuilding of the main roads received due prominence.

“ The Gates of Afghanistan are open,” said the officials in the various capitals of the world. “ The King has secured peace in his land, and is inviting foreigners to see for themselves the progress that has already been made in the amenities of his State.”

The mullahs realised that their exclusive and privileged reign over the destinies of their people was doomed. Already they began subterranean campaigns of protest.

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Subtly and secretly, they fed the silent resentment of the country people against the policy which was making hay of past history and traditions. There was a sullen feeling in the ranks of the Army. There was a nation-wide presentiment that these moves actually undermined the power and position of the nation. Amanullah had made his first false step.

He either turned a blind eye to the portents of trouble or he deliberately belittled them. He was already surrounded by a court of flatterers, equal in their insincerity and guile to any group which had clustered like vultures round the Palace of his forefathers. Spurred by their cynical enthusiasms, he decided on a bold policy.

It is remembered that he had already reduced the Treasury to a parlous state. He had not yet set his house in order even to the extent of ridding the State services of the evil of bribery. Chaos was everywhere, save in those small departments which he ruled personally and with dynamic energy. Yet even in face of these dangers he set his face boldly towards an even more rapid policy of modernisation and so-called "reform."

Very soon Kabul streets were filled with more and more foreigners. Turks overlorded it in the Army. They held the senior posts, and graduated automatically into positions of trust and responsibility. They were unpopular, but they leavened the indiscipline of the Army, now denied the inspired leadership of the King, with their smartness, their born military genius, and their parade-ground tactics of conducting themselves.

They bullied their men into a submission which was foreign to them. They were neither admired nor liked, but generally feared. There were minor rebellions, but the ferocity with which they were put down, and Aman-



Photo by "Daily Mail."

ON H.M.S. VICTORY



Photo by "Daily Mail."

ON H.M.S. TIGER

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ullah's approval, were sufficient to discourage even the bravest of the leaders.

The submission of an Afghan to a foreigner, even though the latter be a co-religionist, was unnatural, and many a Turkish officer concealed a trembling heart under the swagger and bravado with which he surrounded himself in civil and military life in Kabul. He was a glittering figure in State processions. He made the most of the dashing uniform supplied by direct order of the King. He, a Turk, was the pride of the Afghan Army.

These new uniforms, which were devised in the brain of Amanullah himself, were strange combinations of musical comedy chorus apparel and utility. Somewhere, Amanullah must have seen and admired the pictures of an ancient army which went to war clad in all the panoply of the stage costumiers. Nothing would satisfy him but elaborate tunics with an abundance of gold braid. The epaulettes were heavy and of silver braid. The breeches of his Royal Bodyguard were creamy white. For caps, he went back a few years for the inspiration of the shako, and decorated it with a heavy tassel which pulled it to one side at the most dashing of angles. Boots were of the Central Asian type, since revived in every self-respecting Drury Lane drama of impossible kingdoms and romantic armies of the lighter stage. They were high-heeled and shiny, and reached well up the thigh, to be rounded off with a natty design in chased leather work and a further tassel for State occasions.

Long curved swords clanked through the new Kabul gardens in these days, and trailed along the roads in wonderful semblance of military splendour and complete uselessness. Gloves were white, and the sun was put to shame by the patent leather, gold braid, pipe-clayed

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breeches, and startling epaulettes of an army that might well have been commanded by Mr. Harry Welchman on the battlefields of the Gaiety Theatre. They could not fail to impress the doubters, but their wearers were nevertheless often hungry and despondent.

The uniforms, naturally enough, were from Turkish sources, and were painfully unfitted for the work which Afghan soldiers might be expected to perform. But they surrounded the King in an aura of majesty, and he congratulated himself on the fact that the Court of the first King of Afghanistan surpassed in splendour any previous entourage of a mere Amir. And to compensate for the extravagance the tax-gatherers were bidden press their victims with an even greater relentlessness. The peasant eventually had to pay for his own improvement.

Similarly, the Exchequer found it hard to satisfy the contractors who were concentrating all their energies on State schemes. Many of the road-builders held bills on the State worth thousands of Afghan rupees. They worked feverishly, completing roads which would last for at least six months, in their efforts to pile up a mountain of debt which would give them an invaluable hold on the Government. On every month's work, they made a fortune on skimmed labour and short materials. Never before had there been such a reward for enterprise. And with a pathetic trust in the security of the Government, the contractors regarded with satisfaction the unpaid accounts mounting up to their credit.

Amanullah did not care. Those who urged him to put the brake on wild extravagance, were warned that their temerity did not justify their manhood. This was not the spirit which would rebuild a nation. It was necessary to risk much to gain the respect of the world. And the

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work went on, hastened by Amanullah himself, the burden of debt increasing day by day by the beginning of huge new projects.

Certainly there was one example in Kabul which may have urged the King still further in his extravagances. This was the building of the new British Legation, under the direction of Sir Francis Humphrys. It was a magnificent building, and if the intention was to impress the Afghan Court with a semblance of permanency and confidence, then the great white house and its elaborate gardens served its purpose.

It was surrounded by a wall of imposing dimensions, but of little purpose as a possible fortification. It was approached by great iron gates reaching to the top of the walls, and at each side a small guard-house stood for the convenience of the small Indian cavalry garrison.

It was white, spacious, and terraced in white stone, leading down to gardens of English pattern. It had balconies and wide verandahs. Inside, it was gaining the appearance of a real English country house transported into the wilds.

An English butler was already installed. He would admit with the customary imperturbability, heritage of the English butler, all the strange figures then leading Afghanistan, conduct their shuffling feet into the library, and insist as far as was possible on the retention of those formalities which were practised by his father and his grandfather in the handling of guests.

The dining-room was oak, and round its imposing table, in the light of candles, the strangest mixture of races and individuals would meet on those frequent occasions when Sir Francis held receptions and intimate little dinner-parties.

Amanullah would be a frequent visitor. He had

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made a friend from the first meeting with Sir Francis Humphrys, and already there was beginning to grow an affection and a respect between the two men that were destined to survive some troublous history. Indeed, many of the patchwork chapters of excitement and surprise were to be affected by the hours of conversation enjoyed by these two men, the one urbanely Western, the other dynamically Eastern, in the rooms of that rambling white house overlooking the plains of Kabul.

Lady Humphrys had supervised the interior decoration, and had imbued the rooms with an atmosphere of England.

There were bright chintzes and comfortable, brilliant cushions. There were feminine touches everywhere, and flowers from the great terraces in every corner. Not the least of the pioneering triumphs of women in the East have been their skill in transporting a little bit of England into their drawing-rooms. In this pleasant house there was the spirit of England. It was an oasis.

Amanullah must have been impressed. The Legation's sense of permanence was intended as a compliment to him, and it did nothing but increase his confidence. The arrival of Lady Humphrys, and the wife of another English official, deepened that trust. He could point to the British Legation as an indication of the hopes entertained in other countries for his progress and ultimate victory.

He pressed on ever faster with his schemes, even under the shadow of bankruptcy.

Though diplomatic circles were horrified at the slightest discussion of the encouragement given to Amanullah by the British representative in Kabul, it is an undoubted fact that the King gained fresh confidence after every visit to his friend Sir Francis. Relations

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between the two men often broke away from the narrow limits usual between ruler and foreign envoy. They were men who could respect each other, and who had many interests in common.

Chief of these were their mutual love of sport and their equal skill with rod and gun. More than once they joined forces, though in these days Sir Francis was the most frequent explorer of the outlying hills and valleys of the country. When he returned from these trips, he would regale Amanullah with a description of his success, and perhaps into his sporting conversations there would often enter some piece of information regarding the attitude of the simple people of the wilds toward their new King.

Above all, the friendship relied on the deep knowledge, possessed by Sir Francis, of the Eastern mentality. In particular, he knew the hardy Northerner, and his experiences in the Khyber Pass, where he had held an important and diplomatic position, were now of considerable value to him.

Always, the talk would turn on the future, and the King would lose the strained look of anxiety that furrowed his brow these days. He would be uplifted by the hopes and ambitions which he had carved out for his country. The old fighting spirit was back. He was the warrior bringing his valour and his determination into the paths of peace. Sir Francis never expressed his doubts, and, invariably non-committal, never gave voice to the fears that were held by every other knowledgeable person in the country, and which must have been shared by himself.

All the news of the Court was brought to the British Legation by the King himself. He would ask advice from Sir Francis, and become the bold young man again

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while he outlined his plans for the outwitting of his enemies. It was a hard task for Sir Francis to keep silent if he wished to voice his fears, but his strict policy of non-interference with the domestic politics of this strange land was never shaken.

Other visitors to the big white house were the diplomats from other legations. The Russians came, though there were already signs of strain between the representatives of the two countries. They would stare in envy at the imposing building, convey to their host their congratulations at his confidence in the future, and retire wondering at the strange policy of Great Britain.

The Germans would come, and would share the astonishment of their neighbours in the Legation district nearer the summer resort of Paghman. They also would wonder how it came about that a nation willing to pay so much money for the institution of a diplomatic mission in Kabul, should yet let slide the opportunities for trade as Great Britain had done.

For Kabul was packed with German and Russian engineers. There were already the pilots who formed the nucleus of an all-Russian Air Force. They had uniforms of a style all their own. They were pale blue giants, gaitered and even occasionally spurred, and they also were piling up the mountains of debt that the Government already owed to its servants.

There were Italian wireless engineers on the pay-roll, ready for a wireless station. There were engineers for road-making, come to teach the Afghan contractor the latest methods of the West. There were German mining engineers, idling their time away in Kabul, waiting for orders that never came.

Amanullah was convinced that his country was rich in precious metals. He was, indeed, correct in this

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belief, for tests had proved that there existed mines of gold, platinum, and other metals which, if developed, could have reaped a rich harvest for the State. The reports of those German engineers who did actually inspect the seams of coal, almost inaccessible, in the hills of the Hindu Kush, show that there is an abundance. Whether their richness will ever justify their working, is, of course, another matter.

At the moment, at any rate, there could be for Amanullah no likelihood of replenishing the Treasury by the wealth of the hills. The project languished and collapsed, leaving many highly paid officers in Kabul, finishing their contracts for the Afghan Government and being paid now and then.

Already there were to be seen pretty young Russian girls parading the avenues in the evening cool. They were the employees of the various legations, the clerks and the minor heads of departments in the great block of offices maintained by the Russians, and junior ranks of the secretariat in the Afghan Government itself.

They were rouged and powdered. They wore short skirts and high-heeled shoes. Women being women, they had contrived to introduce the latest fashions into the desert, and beguiled themselves into believing that Kabul was very little different from Moscow or Leningrad.

A café had sprung up for the use of the foreign population. There was already an hotel. And Amanullah, thorough, even if misguided, had sent down a score of Afghan servants to the Taj Mahal Hotel, Bombay, for education in European cooking and serving at European tables.

Already the desert had been swept bare of rocks to

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make Paghman, the summer capital. It was an ideal situation. The road led fourteen miles out of Kabul to the foothills. It climbed gently towards the fir-tree zone, and ended in a little plateau which offered every natural advantage for the lay-out of a perfect replica of an Italian garden. There were fountains, shady walks, formal flower-beds, and a rigid wire fence surrounding the whole enclosure. The State café took pride of place at the top of the gardens. It was a strange architectural mongrel, bastard French and Italian, with here and there the mosaic of old Persia in its tiled floor. It had a balcony commanding a view of the garden. It was the rendezvous of the representatives of all the strange countries engaged in the building of the new city.

In the centre of the garden, Amanullah had built a bandstand ! Shades of municipal gardens and seaside promenades ! It was gaudy according to the custom, ugly according to precedent, and was destined to be the centre of attraction exactly similar to its models in the West.

In the garden also were hard iron seats for the elegant to take their repose. They were used exclusively by the Europeans. The Afghans, those few of them who entered the gardens, preferred to lounge on the grass. But Amanullah, seeing these evidences of formality, gentility, and acute discomfort, congratulated himself that he had introduced into his country all the amenities which flourished in civilised countries, and which he had never seen. Paghman gardens might have been situated in any of the pleasure resorts of England, Italy, or France.

In the cool of the afternoon, the nursemaids would wheel their charges along the tidy gravel paths, chatter

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with their friends, and discuss the children. The engineers would come for relaxation after the strain of doing nothing all day. The European officers would stroll there and conduct hasty but violent overtures of affection with the synthetically beautiful nursemaids. It was a strange, unnatural place.

In one corner there had already sprouted the first few feet of the walls of a "super-cinema." It was to be the only one in Afghanistan, but its dimensions, its incredible ugliness, and its shining roof would surely entitle it to the title of "super." It reared an ugly trunk as the symbol of the ugliness of the West. Amanullah was very proud of the idea.

The roads were lined with young poplar trees, which would later screen travellers from the rays of the sun. Paghman was a haven for those who had grown up in the artificial parks of the West.

Even more ambitious, however, were the plans for the construction of a capital to replace Kabul. This was to be called Darulaman, after the King, and was to form a centre for the various Government departments which already threatened to overflow their accommodation.

Great circular blocks of offices were to be built. Central courtyards would give entrance to ranges of departments. Clerks would be housed in luxury and modernity. Superior officers of the State would work in conditions suitable to the fame of the capital of a new nation. There would be communal lodging-houses for the employees of the State. There would be imposing gardens and wide, sweeping drives. Darulaman would be the wonder of the East, its conception brought about by the combined brains of every nation in the world except Great Britain.

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Even now a railway was under construction which would make history in the country. It was the first, and a neat little station was already built in Kabul. It would run on a single line to Darulaman, taking the visitors and the foreign business men to the capital.

A new palace was to be built. It would connect closely with the city of clerks, and would form a detail in the huge scheme of reconstruction and enlargement. Kabul, the new city with the name of Amanullah figuring for ever in its plaques and on its foundation stones, would rise anew a safe distance away from the history-soaked remnants of the old.

Amanullah even contemplated a clearance scheme in the old commercial centre of Kabul City. Such a rabbit-warren could not be allowed to exist within hail of the wonder city. He contemplated a sudden swoop on the old place, driving out the merchants and forcing them to inhabit new and thoroughly modern dwellings and shops near Darulaman.

These many plans simmered in his brain. The contractors were only too ready to start work, or at least to dump the goods in their appointed places for the builders. Then they began the more delicate but amenable pastime of petitioning for their pay.

There were already thousands of men working at Darulaman. They had succeeded, under the command of foreign architects, in at least giving an indication of the size of the future city. Amanullah went there often, to supervise the work and watch his plans put into concrete and brick. He was still the impetuous, the impatient, and the energetic young man.

But the city of Darulaman was destined never to rise very high on its foundations under Amanullah's

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direction. The old city is still there. The commercial bazaar basks still in the noonday sun, packed with disease, intrigue, cheerful noise, and the clatter and clang of Eastern commerce.

The railway never ran a train along its single line to the glory of Amanullah. Amanullah never had the supreme thrill of watching a railway train steam out of Kabul for the wonder city.

The cinema in Paghman showed a film or two in its time, and was duly hailed with wonderment and delight by the astonished natives. The bandstand was quite rightly the pivotal point round which circulated the talent, wit, and administrative intellect of Afghanistan, while massed bands ground out a real national anthem newly composed, from within its hideous pillars.

The café in its time served out hundreds and thousands of brilliantly coloured ices, and thousands of cups containing green tea; and the poplar trees grew to shade the sanded road leading up to the Paghman Palace. The poplars are there still, shading a road that led to nowhere but a desert of lost hopes and desolate expectations.

But Darulaman ! If there is a sea of lost ships, there must be a country of lost cities. The old dead-and-gone cities of Annam will be there; the desolate ruins that were the glory of Peru; Biblical cities, giving a trace of their cool magnificence; Pompeii.

With them, pale shadows of the past, will be Amanullah's dream city of Darulaman, which grew a few feet in the air and then withered. If hopes are translated into brick and mortar, then it overtops the others. In the dream city, clerks run about their business all day long. There is no corruption, but boundless funds, and



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an unending source of revenue from goods pouring over the borders. The whole ruled by a dark, thick-set man with eyes looking ever ahead—Amanullah.

His city, Darulaman, shows its skeleton above the desert and scrub of the Kabul Plain, but it is no longer Amanullah who directs its growth.

CHAPTER VI

THE EUROPEAN TRIP—FAREWELL TO A KING—A QUEEN
UNVEILS—LONDON REJOICES—A DEFIANCE OF TRADITION

IN the summer of 1927, a strange rumour fled round the wineshops of Kabul. It was to the effect that King Amanullah was going to Europe.

The full sensation of that whisper is difficult to realise without a knowledge of the past traditions of the Afghan. It is true that certain well-born young men of the highest families of Kabul and Kandahar had been sent during the past few years to the military colleges of France and Germany. Nadir Khan himself, the Commander-in-Chief of the Afghan Army, had learned his military lore in France. Others had been to the universities and the colleges of science. There were several promising young Afghan students in Moscow and Queen Souriya's brother was at Exeter College, Oxford.

These, however, were different. They were travelling for their own advantage, and no doubt could bring back their knowledge for the benefit of their country, though, to be truthful, the older Kabulis thought they proved a devil of a nuisance with their new-fangled ideas.

The rumour grew. The great whispering gallery of Kabul was never silent. As it travelled, the whisper prospered, both in picturesqueness and certainty. The streets were agog with it. It was the sole topic in the samovar shops. It hurried out of Kabul on the lips of travellers, and penetrated in all its incredible and fearful truth into the remote villages of the hills. The King was going away to Europe.

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Hard on the heels of the rumour came its official confirmation. In a declaration, Amanullah stated his reasons and his hopes in making the journey.

He was slightly apologetic, as well as challenging. He made it clear that he did not intend to brook opposition, but he thought it wiser to represent himself as a humble pawn of fate rather than as a ruler breaking away from precedent for the love of it.

For he knew what would be said by the mullahs. He was right.

They looked more and more gloomy as the news was confirmed.

No Amir had left his country before, save for sudden rushes across the Frontier at the head of his troops. No Amir had cast curious eyes further than the boundaries of his State. No ruler had sought to see the other world across the Black Water, being, in point of fact, rather contemptuous of the soft and easy living which, it was reported, was the custom among the *feringhe*.

Rumour, moreover, attributed some strange reasons for the impending tour. It was, frankly, for the assimilation of European ideas. It was for the collection of those very habits and customs which Afghans had ever prided themselves on resisting. It was for the plain purpose of bringing back European ways to Afghanistan. No wonder they pondered sadly as the news rippled over Afghanistan like the waves from a stone thrown in a pond.

The news was substantiated from abroad. In regular succession there came invitations from the Powers of the West. Italy, France, Germany, Russia, Egypt, and Switzerland sent their official programmes, as well as Great Britain. Day after day the wireless stations of the world were busy with the name of Amanullah. Nation was vying with nation to do him honour.

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Even then the mullahs were not pleased. They attributed the lowest motives to this universal wish to honour their King. They cared not a jot for the free advertisement which their country was receiving. They snapped their fingers in contempt at the compliments which crackled through the ether. Afghanistan for the Afghans! They pinned their faith to that old slogan and nothing could budge them.

Amanullah said that too. His motives were no doubt sincerely patriotic. He really believed that he could materially benefit his people by a visit to Europe. Apart from the commercial prosperity which he believed would accrue, he valued highly the respect of other nations. He revelled in every official protestation of respect. He believed in every flattery. In some vague way he believed he could educate his people to the same appreciation.

The date was now fixed. The formalities during his journey in India were arranged. He himself could not help feeling a real thrill at the thought of the adventure before him.

It is difficult for Western people to realise the shock that such an ordinary journey as the first part of this would mean to a man such as Amanullah. The wonder of a railway train was new to him. The wonder of the sea, the mystery of the ships that plied their way through the waves—all were new.

He had never seen the sea. He had never seen a railway train. He had never seen a ship. Never before had he set foot outside his own country, nor seen other men and the manner in which they conduct their lives.

But before he went, he issued yet another declaration, this time more apologetic in tone than the last. *Qui s'excuse s'accuse*. But he had never heard that saying.

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The new apologia was in the form of an "Ithad-i-Mishan," or Royal statement. In flowery language it set forth the lofty ideals that had inspired the tour. It said: "By the greatness of God, by the nation's enterprise, and by the efforts of thy servant, Afghanistan in the shadow of freedom has bidden adieu for ever to its stationary position. It has joined the social and living nations of the world. This life, so important for freedom, can only be maintained if we participate in the social advancement. In the last eight years of freedom, laws have been passed and introduced to the country. I want to acquaint myself with the present mode of living in Europe, as certain ways of that Continent are being adopted here, so that after study we shall introduce them if thought necessary. It is a fact that many other rulers have done so. This made me resolve to do so. You should therefore rule most carefully while I am absent. Nobody should be oppressed. Farewell."

The above, a literal translation as far as is possible, gives clearly enough Amanullah's state of mind at the time. It reveals the slight fear of leaving his land to his lieutenants. It shows his avowed intention of bringing back with him some object-lessons from Europe. It promises yet more shocks for the mullahs. It boasts of the reforms which were already in operation in the country. And it has the right apologetic note that was an inevitable feature of his mind at that moment.

There was a farewell durbar at Jallalabad, at which the usual fulsome speeches were made by those who were currying favour. The Court was in a flurry of preparation till the last moment. But eventually, on December 10, 1927, a large red Rolls-Royce drew out of the fort at Spin Baldak, name of grim memories to British troops. A thousand bearded and armed hillmen cheered, breaking the ranks of the police to crowd

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round the car. Rifles were fired into the early morning mist, and the car passed slowly down the decorated and beflagged route. The car stopped, and Amanullah stepped from it. Casting round in the crowd, he selected a *malik*, a soldier, and a peasant, and kissed them. "That is my farewell to my leaders, my soldiers, and my people," he said. The people went wild with enthusiasm as he drove on, and ran the three miles beside his car to Chaman.

When he stepped from the car, thirty-one guns boomed their salute, and a British military band struck up the Afghan National Anthem. For the first time in history, an Afghan ruler had ventured from his own territory.

The enthusiasm of the Afghan crowds was so great that they broke over the Frontier. Laughing and excited as children, they escaped the British Indian guards, and continued their way to the meeting, just over the border, between Amanullah and the officials of Quetta.

The King was followed by the Queen, wearing black, and veiled. Her party was followed by the coolies and the Army transport carts carrying the hundred and fifty pieces of luggage which comprised their goods for the tour.

Aeroplanes circled overhead and looped and dipped in salute. The little railway platform at Chaman, furthest outpost of the system in Baluchistan, was packed with the glitter and array of the Army and the civil services, in levee uniform. Red carpets led the way to two specially built carriages which had cost £15,000 to construct. The guns boomed out once more, a telegram from the King of England was handed to Amanullah, and for the first time in his life he stepped into a railway carriage, white and gold on the outside, with the Royal crest of Afghanistan on its flank, flying the Union Jack and the green flag of his Court.

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The carriages were lined with Burma teak and the fittings were silver. The ceilings were white, and the curtains were old gold. The bathrooms were white tiled, and the bedrooms were old gold and blue. At the last minute, after requesting that there be separate bedrooms for himself and his Queen, Amanullah had changed his mind and asked for double accommodation.

That change was made by men working day and night in the railway workshops in Lahore before the wonder train went up the tortuous track to the Frontier. Army aeroplanes accompanied the white train till dusk fell. Amanullah looked out of the window, and gazed excitedly at the country towards which his eyes had often turned in envy. The train pulled gently through the night and stopped at Karachi the next morning.

Once more the old formula of gun-salutes, presentations, red carpets, and bouquets for the Queen. Amanullah spoke in Persian in reply to numerous addresses of welcome, and Souriya attended a *purdah* party. She wore a Paris frock, abandoned the veil that hid the lower part of her face, and for the first time gave rise to the fables of her beauty, later told all over the Western world.

But she had skill and daring in thus displaying her beauty. She was a woman of character, thus to appear in the East, dressed in a Paris frock of cream and blue, and a picture hat. She was implementing the courage of her husband. And the ladies of Karachi, meeting her for the first time, told enthusiastic stories of her beauty and wit.

She urged her Indian hosts to educate their children. She pointed to the first efforts in the field of education being made in her own country. She charmed every listener. Then they went to Bombay.

On the little ship taking them, Amanullah played

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deck games with his usual enthusiasm and energy, shot birds from the bridge, and displayed a child's wonder in the sea. He tried to shoot fish, and laughed at his failure. He was a small boy again, seeing something new. Never, save when he adopted the other childish pose of petulance and obstinacy, did he lose that sense of delighted novelty until he returned once more to his country.

Two days later they sighted the Gateway to the East, at Bombay, and sighted too the massed welcome drawn up to meet them.

The Queen was still veiled, though she had taken off the *purdah* clothes on her way in the steamer. She did the round of parties there too, speaking at the *purdah* receptions, repeating once more the parrot talk of education that she had learnt from Amanullah.

There were banquets, tours of Bombay, and State visits. There was a slight breath of trouble, when the Viceroy of India was unable to meet Amanullah, as he was ill in bed, but generally speaking the delicate occasions passed off well. Compliments were thick as autumn leaves. Amanullah spoke of "his dear neighbour India," and was horrified to hear that the Pathans, who had gathered to meet him and do him honour, were among the most troublesome communities in Bombay.

Just like the good young prince in the fairy tales, he adjured them to behave themselves and submit to the wise rule of the British-Indian police. The Pathans might have laughed, but did not. Instead, they hung flowers round the neck of the descendant of great and powerful Amirs.

The London *Times*, in a leading article, bestowed the usual compliments, ending with the sage remark : "There can be no fear that on his return to his country

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King Amanullah will risk a complete break with tradition."

Thus it seemed that the whole world was combining to swell the head that was already bursting.

And on the 17th of December the Gateway of India was again ablaze with colour. The S.S. *Rajputana* churned her way West with the fêted King on board.

The optimism of *The Times* was no doubt based on reason and sound common sense. It could not reasonably be expected that Amanullah would be infected with the germ of the West so seriously as to lose his sense of proportion. Yet that was exactly what was happening. Every blare of bugles in his honour went to his head. Every red carpet was a delight to his eye. Every compliment was absorbed greedily. The phenomenon has happened before, and will happen again. The British Government, when it finally decides to honour its visitors, sends them into paroxysms of self-congratulation. It is dangerous in the West. It is playing with dynamite when the guest is of the East.

Amanullah had replied to the compliments with true Eastern reciprocity and tact. He had urged the Mahomedans to live peaceably with Hindus. He had returned bouquet for bouquet in his perfect Persian accent. He had been the slightly impulsive but charming guest, and had endeared himself to all as a real man and a strong one.

The circumstances of his visit to India, the pomp and formality which accompanied his journey down to the liner at Bombay, were carefully noted in his own country. There were ears anxious for every detail of that tour of triumph. The significance of the rivalry in Europe, to do him honour and to impress him, was not lost in Kabul. With the satisfaction generally felt, however, there was a slight feeling of contempt that such

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trivialities were having their effect upon the ruler. Old complaints are not easily forgotten in Afghanistan. The true Afghan is distrustful, and cannot be put off with mere compliments. And for ever and for ever, they would abide by their old contention that the British were usurpers in India, aliens in the East, and, more important than all, that they were white infidels.

Tradition dies hard. The mullahs, already cogitating on the possible advantage they could take of the King's European visit, were determined that the tradition of distrust of the British should never be forgotten.

But all was gaiety on the good ship *Rajputana* as she ploughed through the Indian Ocean and approached Aden. Amanullah was energetic and anxious to please. He distributed largess to the crew. He took part in every social activity on the wide deck. He was amiable to every Englishman, and trained himself assiduously for the ordeal before him.

Queen Souriya divested herself of every trace of *purdah*, with the consent and encouragement of Amanullah. She was now the complete Westernised Asiatic. She bloomed under the treatment, and was herself the centre of interest in the Royal party.

One of the critical visits of the trip was the arrival at Suez.

King Fuad was out to meet them. In deference to his wishes, it is believed, Souriya once more wore the veil, though she was loath to part with the Western clothes that she already wore with complete lack of self-consciousness. At Port Said, however, she received Egyptian officials, wearing the veil, and the news travelled round the world and back to Kabul.

The guns boomed a welcome from the banks of the Canal. King Fuad and Amanullah conversed in Turkish. An elaborate programme had been arranged in Cairo

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and Alexandria over Christmas and the New Year. And it was at some time during their first meetings, by some gesture or action, that King Fuad or one of his underlings bitterly offended his sensitive guest. Amanullah was annoyed.

For public consumption, it was stated that the King was somewhat vague in his arrangements. Certainly he was difficult to entertain. He was unwilling to arrange for his participation in any programme many hours ahead, and even when he did, it could not be certain that he would adhere to his plans.

That was the story issued to account for the shortening of the programme arranged for him, and for his tardiness on many public occasions. As one writer described, hinting at the truth : “ The visit has been a success in spite of the difficulty of arranging for a guest who has always done what he likes and when he likes. It is only with difficulty that he can be persuaded to make up his mind. He is always late, and invariably wants to alter his orders at the last moment.”

We have seen enough of Amanullah's character, however, to know that he seldom changed his mind. Having decided on a course of action, he stuck to it right or wrong. These delays, these minor difficulties, were not inevitable. And the climax came when King Fuad waited, and the whole Egyptian military review waited, half an hour for the presence of the chief guest. Obviously, though without giving any definite cause for a breach, Amanullah had shown that he was not flattered by the hospitality of the Egyptians.

The extensive programme for a tour of Egypt was cancelled. In its place Amanullah consented to visit Luxor, and met Lord Lloyd—a man whom he must have respected and liked, for there was a lot in common between the two strong men, neither of whom could

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brook interference. From his villa in Giza, Amanullah gave plentifully to the poor, inspected the students' quarters, and expressed the hope that one day Afghan students would join their fellow-Muslims in these surroundings.

But in spite of the outward signs of amicability, the Egyptian visit was not a success.

On the 5th of January he sailed to Naples, and it can be said that of all the nations he visited, the people of Italy were most to his liking. He revelled in their sun-lit southern land. He saw much in common with his own people, with their quick humour, their impulsive temperament, and their olive skins.

He was treated well, there were no old grievances over which to be diplomatic or sensitive, and they also gave him a welcome to Europe which touched his responsive heart and flattered his vanity as a ruler.

At the Ciampino Aerodrome, near Rome, he saw the evolutions of hundreds of 'planes. At the Scala in Milan he saw the art of the stage for the first time. He went over the Lancia works in Milan, and he entrusted to the Fiat works orders for a hundred motor lorries and small cars which were to be despatched to his capital immediately.

He gave £1000 to the poor of Rome, a photograph of himself and his Queen to the Pope, and sent with the gift a pair of lapis lazuli candlesticks which cost him a small fortune. All these things were noted in Kabul.

When he left for Nice a fortnight later, he was wearing the Order of Annunciata, conferred by the King, and the Order of the Golden Spur. He was getting into his stride.

While in Italy, too, Sir Francis Humphrys had visited him to arrange for the last details of his stay in London. It may be taken as certain that the incidents in Cairo

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did not evade the attention of the British Minister in Kabul. It was there, between two friends, that Sir Francis made Amanullah promise that he would behave himself in London.

“ You will not be late in England,” said Sir Francis.

“ I will not be late.”

He was not. But he did not grieve unduly for the reflection on King Fuad and the might of martial Egypt.

The golden Riviera did not hold him for long. He was preparing for the assault on Paris, Berlin, and London. And on the 25th of January he drove to the Quai d'Orsay between the pennants of the cavalry, was welcomed by the President, M. Doumergue, and watched from his window while the cheering crowds swarmed round his temporary home. Surely his life's dream had come true at that moment. . . .

He flung another £1000 to the poor of Paris. The English journalists were concocting adjectives to do justice to Queen Souriya's beauty, now unveiled, and the almost hysterical Parisians pondered on the strange fact that her name was nearly identical with their word for a smile. . . . Paris provided a really French welcome.

Even the scares inseparable from a Royal visit were not forgotten. It was said that the King had cut himself shaving, and true enough he appeared with his face bandaged. The terrors of the West. But he still smiled, amused the crowds by his unconventionality, and entered into the gay life of the streets with the zest of a boy.

From Paris, while the Press was being ecstatic about the forthcoming Royal procession in London, he went to Berlin, where he became an Honorary Doctor of the Technical College. “ My students must come here too,”

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he said. Indeed, the students of Kabul and Kandahar seemed likely to become international travellers. He visited Krupps, and ordered a new troop-carrying lorry. As an afterthought, he commanded it to be fitted with a body suitable for transporting school-children !

There was one hitch. The Socialists objected to the expenditure of money on his entertainment. Speeches were made asking what benefit could come from the so-lavish use of public funds. But Amanullah never heard that end of it. The usual £1000 was handed to the poor of Berlin.

British official wireless to the East expanded itself, during these days, on the care taken in London for the plans for the coming visit. The telegraphs crackled with news of the decoration of the suite reserved for the Royal pair at Buckingham Palace, and again at Claridge's Hotel. The order of the procession, headed by King George and King Amanullah, followed by Queen Mary and Queen Souriya, was faithfully given to the great reading public of the East.

Destroyers turned off their patrol course in mid-ocean and threshed their way to the Channel. The Fleet went home for inspection. Airplanes received their orders for the great day. London was garlanded, and maps made of the route to be taken by a young man, now thirty-eight, and his beautiful queen ten years younger than he.

The public was even told of a half-million pound credit arranged for Amanullah between his country and the Continent and England. It was, rumour said, for his use when ordering French, German, and Italian goods. The rumour was promptly denied, but it was, as a fact, the first suggestion that such a course would be necessary at his present rate of progress. England waited on tiptoe for the first glimpse of a romantic

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Eastern monarch, ruler of a wild people, descendant, so it was said, of a line of savage rulers in a forbidden land. The public lapped it up.

Let us, however, look at Amanullah calmly at this epoch in his career. He is still a young man, looking younger than he actually is. This is due to his dynamic energy, his intelligent and fearless eyes, and his nervous impulsiveness. He might at first sight be considered stout, but this is largely due to his build. He is nervous because of the homage suddenly offered to him. He is self-conscious because he is untutored in the ways of the West, and is afraid of making a *gaffe*.

He is ruler of a backward land which is hardly solvent. Without his guidance, his country would soon slide back into ignorance and sloth.

He is not yet certain in his heart that he was not rash to leave his capital at this critical time. Having, however, scraped together a considerable sum of money, he has ventured. The result has been better than any of his wildest hopes.

He knows the value of the promises given to him by his lieutenants. He may at any moment be left without a throne. He is in an ideal position for the usurper and the traitor. Sometimes the thought comes to him, even among this present splendour and triumph. But he thrusts it from his mind. There can be no turning back.

He goes now to be fêted in the midst of the country which he fought nine years ago. He goes to meet the English, those whom he always called "usurpers in the East." Fine men they are, but nevertheless usurpers. No Amir before him has dared to do this thing. For an Amir to leave his country was synonymous with his leaving his throne. Amanullah, Peace of God, has dared.

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Blow then, bugles of welcome ! History is being made, and a man of the hills, a true Afghan, has come into the territory of his dreams. The destroyers are wheeling into line for his honour. The aeroplanes, fighters and bombers and scouts, are circling in mass formation for his delight. The red carpets are down, and the rifles come to the "present" with a slap, for a King of the East. Kings, queens, and princes are summoned to meet him. Cash is running short, but here is another thousand for the poor of the West. Blow, bugles of welcome !

So he crosses the Channel, the destroyer pitching and burying her nose in English waters. The cruisers are in line ahead, there in his honour. The 'planes keep up their ceaseless zooming accompaniment to this great day. Amanullah quells the tumult of pride in his breast, and when he goes down the gangway, meets the Prince of Wales, treads the red carpet to the special train, and acknowledges the frenzied cheers of the English crowd this 13th afternoon of March, 1928, the newspaper men say that he is "every inch a King."

He is not. He is a slightly swelled-headed but thoroughly healthy Eastern boy at a huge picnic.

CHAPTER VII

A LONDON WELCOME—A KINGLY JUGGLER—AMANULLAH
SEES ENGLAND—AN OMEN FROM KABUL—FINANCE AND
HONOURS

BUT Amanullah, if he were not every inch a King, was a romantic enough figure. His grey-green cloak hung bravely from his broad shoulders. His shako well suited the dashing carelessness of his uniform. He observed the Afghan prejudice against personal jewellery, which, on the Indian Princes, he had despised, but his breast sparkled with medals and decorations.

His legs were cased in pale blue, and his tunic was scarlet. A sword trailed the ground. His hands were gloved in white.

Souriya, in a Paris frock and hat, never flinched in the glare of the flashlights. She need not have been troubled about her appearance. The heavy jewelled ear-rings, a present from Amanullah the day before, swung gently to her shoulders to the envy of the feminine crowds which awaited her arrival in London.

On the platform were the King and Queen, Mr. Baldwin the Premier, and the Cabinet. The Duke and the Duchess of York, Prince George, and the Duke of Connaught were others come to do him honour. Troops and police held back the crowds.

There was a slight contretemps when the commanding officers did not recognise the Afghan National Anthem, and failed to bring their troops to the salute, but such details were forgotten in the tide of spontaneous cheering

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that swept over the first Royal carriage, containing King George and King Amanullah, as it drove out of the station and along a route lined with troops. It was maintained when there followed the second landau with the two Queens. London, as it invariably does, waxed hysterical over Royalty, thrilling to the depths of its democratic heart. Two Kings and two Queens to look at! Englishmen and Afghans talking together! It was a great day for rubber-necks, and apparently everyone had forgotten how only nine years before British soldiers had sweated in combat with the soldiers of this alert little Afghan.

The Belgian Suite at Buckingham Palace had been decorated in *Rose du Barri* for the occasion. As the British official wireless had promised, the furniture had been added to by little touches which might serve to still the pangs of home-sickness in the visitors. There were Eastern rugs and brasses. There were inlaid tables and carvings for the delight of the guests.

At the State reception and banquet that night, Queen Souriya wore a low-cut Paris gown and the famous earrings. Amanullah wore a new levee uniform. The Queen of England wore Persian blue, and on her breast gleamed the *Koh-i-noor*. The King sat down in the uniform of an Admiral of the Fleet, and among his decorations was the Star of Afghanistan.

Princes and diplomats and councillors formed the guests at the banquet. There were speeches, in which the King referred to his constant watch on the progress of King Amanullah in educating his country, and trusted that he would be granted many years of life to continue his work. Amanullah replied with the usual compliments in Persian.

There were visits to the Cenotaph and to Westminster Abbey. Queen Mary accompanied the visitors to Drury

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Lane, where, appropriately, the *Desert Song* was being performed. Other visits were made to theatres. Fearful and wonderful were the stories with which the public was regaled even while the visitors were being entertained at Buckingham Palace. What they lacked in truth, they certainly made up in picturesqueness. On the one hand it was reported that the English King and Queen were entertaining barbarians. On the other hand it was whispered that the Afghan visitors were acquitting themselves with far better decorum and decency than had many other celebrities.

The truth was, however, that Amanullah and his Queen were quick to conform to formal English manners. From the first they had the greatest liking for elegant furniture and expensive fittings. It had been arranged for them to stay at Buckingham Palace for two days.

The robustness of the King's humour; the unconventionality of his manners; his entire lack of self-consciousness after the first breaking of the diplomatic ice; and the quiet dignity of his Queen; all these were perhaps unexpected in such surroundings, but they provided a slight relief and a welcome contrast to the stilted manners of former Royal parties on State visits.

On the subject of Queen Souriya's dignity, indeed, some good stories were told. It was even said that she had abashed Sir Austen Chamberlain, always admitted to be one of the old school of frozen and coldly supercilious statesmen, who gave foreign cartoonists their traditional ideas of British diplomats. The occasion requires an effort of the imagination, but it is by no means impossible to conjecture that Queen Souriya, in an excess of zeal for her Royal rank, and anxious to provide the contrast to the over-jovial manners of her King, had patronised the most severe of our elder

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statesmen. The story, at any rate, went round political circles in London, and redounded to the credit of the beautiful Queen from far away.

The most trying period for the excited Amanullah was over with his departure from Buckingham Palace to Claridge's Hotel, where, in their honour, and at the command of the British Foreign Office, the Royal Suite on the first floor had been redecorated.

The ready imagination of Londoners, aided by various picturesque newspaper stories, had a field-day. Many and varied were the tales told of the happenings in the dining-rooms and the private rooms of Claridge's Hotel. In any case, Amanullah was behaving himself in an exemplary manner. He was not the universal jester that he was portrayed by his chroniclers, though his sense of humour certainly rode uppermost during these formal and exciting days.

Formality did not come easily to him. He had not been accustomed to an excess of polite occasions and the starched etiquette of diplomatic life. Much was expected of him, and he lived up to his promise to behave himself in the best Western manner, as befitted his new glory of Western clothes, in which he took an inordinate delight.

But he tired of the magnificent bedroom which had been allocated to him in the hotel, and took a fancy to a small single bedroom overlooking a courtyard. The Royal Suite was not for a man of the hills. He preferred solitude, for during these days he had much to think over, and much to treasure for future reference when he returned to his country.

He was a favourite among the staff. He treated them in the friendliest fashion, and provided a strong contrast to the sometimes dull example set by former occupants of those rooms on previous Royal visits.

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On one occasion there was a rare dinner party of ten people in the Royal dining-room. They were all magicians. Amanullah showed them his repertoire. The magicians, who thought him no mean producer of rabbits out of hats, playing-cards out of waistcoats, and a fair juggler of balls, reciprocated with various of their simpler devices, many of which were later exhibited for the entertainment of wild tribes in a forlorn corner of the East. And going back to the fairy books, there is surely a faint resemblance to the cheerful kings of olden days, who summoned before them the Court magicians to tickle the Royal fancy after a heavy meal.

It could be wished, however, that the then Lord Mayor of Liverpool had appreciated fairy stories more. If he had, he might have enjoyed more fully the production of an ace of spades from behind his ear in the middle of a civic reception; he might have returned the compliment with a neat hand-spring in the middle of the ceremonial red carpet, and thus have established the amity between Afghanistan and the Mersey City. But the joke failed. When Amanullah transferred his tricks from the dining-room of Claridge's Hotel to the civic reception in the North of England, he reckoned without the unassailable dignity of the Lord Mayor's chain of office.

Amanullah, however, was by no means disheartened. He did not know that a king must curb his sense of humour.

The world might be a better place if kings played parlour tricks on State occasions.

One of Amanullah's personal successes, however, was with the Duchess of York. At a public dinner party, it was noticed that consternation and alarm showed on his face when faced with a harmless glass of lemonade poured from a long jug. The King smelt it, quizzed it,



Photo by "Daily Mail."

AT THE BIRMINGHAM SMALL ARMS FACTORY



Photo by "Daily Mail."

AT THE ROYAL AIR FORCE PAGEANT AT HENDON

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glared suspiciously into its innocent depths. He thought it was demon alcohol. The Duchess saw his plight, assured herself of its purity as the unfermented juice of the lemon, and made reassuring signs to the King. The honour of the Prophet was saved. And saved too was the King's sense of humour at that dinner party.

Amanullah's most personal gift to the King was carefully chosen and carefully brought from his own country. It took the form of a couple of Afghan wolfhounds, the long thin dogs of the hills, heavily "trouserred" as if in cowboy's chaps against the cold of the Afghan hills. They are curious animals, and have only lately enjoyed a vogue in England. Sensitive, swift, and nervous, they combine the speed of a greyhound with the mute pathos of a spaniel. For a time at least they held an honoured place in the King's kennels, and it may be that part of the present London fashion for these dogs arises from that gift from Amanullah to his host.

Another embarrassment to those who were playing the temporary host was the generosity and skill of the various London firms who wished to sell goods to the visiting ruler. Every day hundreds of pounds' worth of goods were delivered at Claridge's on approval for the examination of the King. The majority had not been ordered by Amanullah. They were sent on the off-chance that they would take his fancy, and the stories of his lavish expenditure and royal "tips" to servants no doubt served to foster hope in the breasts of enterprising tradesmen. Many of these goods eventually found their way back to Afghanistan, for Amanullah and his Queen commented favourably on the enterprise of London tradesmen in persuading visiting Royalty. It is naturally expected that visiting Royalty wish to buy, and Amanullah and his Queen were no disappointment to the big London luxury stores.

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As time went on, he came to believe that all the season's pageantry had been arranged for his benefit, though he had been at first incredulous when faced with even such a minor honour as the illumination of Selfridge's Stores in Oxford Street. He was being taken for an evening drive, with Sir Francis Humphrys as his guide. The open car passed along the busy streets, and the huge frontage of the famous store suddenly blazed with welcoming lights as they turned into the thoroughfare.

"That is in your honour," said Sir Francis. "Those words read: 'Long live King Amanullah and Queen Souriya!'"

"I do not believe it," replied Amanullah simply.

But secretly he rejoiced. No mere Amir of Afghanistan had seen as much as a single electric bulb glow in his honour.

Naturally, after the idea had been planted in his brain, he saw every national sporting and social event as a tribute to his visit. Everything was based on his presence. London revolved round him. The mistake was very human and very understandable.

When he was taken to the Boat Race, he protested long and vehemently at the beginning of the race. The long slim boats were ready for the starting gun. The crews were taut and anxious. Amanullah prepared to get out of the launch.

"I think," he said, "that I shall choose the pale blue steersman."

He honestly believed that he was to be shown the sights of London from the frail shell of a racing eight, and credited the waiting thousands of Londoners merely with the desire to see him pass up the river in peculiar, but no doubt customary, state. Having been into the interior of submarines, can it be wondered at that he

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was past surprise, and determined to lift his eyebrows at no more irregularities of this curious Western race ?

Day by day the long cars drew up outside Claridge's to take Amanullah and his Queen to some new wonder of London. They went to the Zoo, and they visited the great railway works at Swindon. Lady Humphrys took Souriya shopping, and the two of them chose mountains of carpets and acres of curtains for the embellishment of far-away palaces in Jallalabad and Paghman and Kabul. There were stacks of furniture, silks and brocades, the finest merchandise of Regent Street and Bond Street, dispatched to the East as a result of these visits. For who could know that soon after their arrival, those very tables and chairs and silks and brocades would serve to feed flames rising high in the Eastern sky, crackling as they were put on the fires that lit the end of a régime, while round the burning there ran and rejoiced the fanatics of one of the wildest and most savage races in the world ? . . .

Amanullah went down to a review of the Fleet. The sum of £6000 was paid for ammunition on that single day alone. He lunched in the wardroom of the *Nelson*. Before his eyes the Fleet manœuvred and plunged to mock war. This, then, was the might of England !

He shrugged his shoulders. "They are no good to me," he said. "Neither on my behalf, nor against me, they are no good. I have no concern with the sea. . . ."

The £6000 seemed somewhat expensive if that was the only impression to remain in the mind of Amanullah.

He dived below the sea in a submarine. He saw tanks at Lulworth.

"They are very fine," he said. "But they could not be used in my country."

Only when he saw the might of the Third Arm was

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he impressed. He went to a flying display, and watched, awed, while the fighters swooped and swerved in mimic battle. He went up in a bomber, and watched the bombs slanting down to the targets. He saw the destruction of a village from the air.

Only after that experience did he go away silent. He was thinking of the new terror of the air.

“War,” he said later, “is a terrible and unromantic thing in your country.”

Perhaps that was precisely the impression that was intended to be made on his sensitive and simple brain. He was awed. His pride was hurt when he considered how puny and how pathetic would be his mountain levies against the terror from the air. Warfare was no longer the pitting of valour against valour. There were to be no longer the heroic clashes of men against men. War was science, and the men of his country were no scientists. It was a bitter moment.

Not till he went down to the huge Small Arms Factory in Birmingham did he once more revel in the romance and adventure of warfare. Then he seized a rifle in the shooting-range, lay down on the mats, and proceeded methodically to plant bullets on the target. The workpeople were immensely pleased, and if the truth be known he was immensely pleased with himself. This was the warfare he understood—the matching of one straight shot with another, the steady arm and the clear vision. He decided to forget the sickening thud of bombs dropped on shattered villages from the air, and the cohorts of drumming planes that darkened the sky. He handled the Lewis guns, and at every demonstration of British engineering skill, he pictured to himself his beloved troops marching across the plains of Afghanistan with these weapons worthy of their bravery.

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He went to the Rolls-Royce works at Derby, and was so pleased by the interest of the workpeople that he did conjuring tricks for their amusement. He was apt and clever. He was beginning to find the humour that lurks only a little way beneath the dignity of every Englishman. He showed humour and skill at his new parlour tricks. He was finding his feet among English crowds, so strange at first. Only once was he late for an appointment. The careful guidance of Sir Francis Humphrys saved him from many a pitfall. And it was his old boyishness and good spirits that unfortunately kept him ten minutes late for a meeting with the Duke of York.

So the weeks passed pleasantly enough until the 16th of March, when a scare story brightened the front pages of the newspapers. It was to the effect that trouble had broken out in Kabul. The rumour was promptly and indignantly denied. It is doubtful whether Amanullah gave the rumour much thought. He was by now obsessed by one idea only, and that was to see as much of the English as he could. He was enjoying himself thoroughly. He had, he felt certain, made a great impression on the English. Troubles in his own country could wait. If there were unappreciative Afghans who did not realise the benefit of their King's visits to the theatres and cathedrals of England, then they must conceal their unpatriotic sentiments.

He must have realised that the day of reckoning would come. Finances already indicated its imminence. The troops were in arrears with their pay. Much of the ready money collected for the trip was due to be repaid. Credit was good, but the huge orders booked with European firms would prove a severe drain on future receipts. Very little had been paid for. The importunate were told that it was slightly impertinent to ask for a

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settlement, and were usually content to wait. But some day, the trip would have to be paid for.

Stories of his expenditure would have reached Kabul. A thousand pounds given to the poor of each capital would seem a great deal of money to be thrown away on the *feringhe*, especially when it had been wrested from a starving nation. Amanullah had his moments of anxiety, but they were soon forgotten in the thrill and enjoyment of some new occasion at which he was chief guest. It was a case of now or never. Let the future look after itself.

But Tarzi Khan, the Afghan Foreign Minister, had not come to England, and had thought it wiser to proceed straight back to Kabul from Paris. The rumours of unrest seemed to be backed up by truthful incidents. It was repeatedly said that the Royal visit would be cut short, and that Amanullah would hasten back to his country without visiting Russia. His answer was to deny these statements out of hand, as a gesture of bravado. He went to the Grand National, where he watched with close interest the methods of the tipsters and the tricksters on the course. There was a visit to Oxford, where Queen Souriya met her brother, then at Exeter. Amanullah told the Oxford authorities who honoured him with the D.C.L. that there had been universities in Afghanistan a thousand years ago.

In Liverpool an ex-soldier presented him with an autograph book, and requested his signature. Seeing the man's poverty, Amanullah wrote his name in Roman script and dug his hand in his pocket. The little present was a £100 note. A king must be kingly in thought and deed, he must have decided. That story, too, went back to Kabul.

The Queen meanwhile was acquitting herself well in the difficult territory of society. She bought toys from

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London shops for her son in Paris, and was an honoured visitor to the great shops, where her taste was ever superintended by Lady Humphrys. The newspapers still sought new adjectives for her beauty, and a certain coiffeur who arranged her hair for the State receptions, stated to an enthralled public that the Queen possessed the most beautiful head of hair in London.

Other visits were made to a Boy Scouts Rally, and to various private houses. The tour was nearly over. And on the 5th of April King Amanullah, his Queen, and his suite, set sail for Paris once more, hurried to Brussels, Warsaw, Riga, Moscow, Angora, and Teheran. The rumours of trouble in Kabul must have assumed more ominous strength as he approached his own country.

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It was some time before the officials, the guides, and the Ministers of State in London began to suspect that they had been backing the wrong horse. They had done it magnificently, energetically, and painstakingly. Apart from the minor consideration of the sum of money spent on the entertainment of Amanullah and his suite, which could not have been below £100,000, the British Government had competed with other European nations in a display of force that had an almost negligible effect.

That impression, conveyed to the confused brain of a man who was already charged with a kaleidoscope of memories, was nullified by the fact that Amanullah was in a few short months to be a puppet ruler. England had put her shirt on an outsider. The somewhat undignified manner in which the official broadcasting corporation took part in the great campaign of ballyhoo did nothing to raise our prestige. There were knowledgeable cynics in the East who, before the very

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beginning of the grand gesture to Amanullah, condemned it whole-heartedly as bad policy. There could be little benefit, even if Amanullah was to be the lifelong ruler of his country. There could be a great deal of harm.

The trouble was that Amanullah took every demonstration of might and wealth purely as a compliment to himself rather than as a gesture of power. Though he was excellently advised, his pride and credulity rendered all these efforts useless if they were intended to induce in him a greater respect for the Government of India, with whom, after all, there rested the greatest responsibility for the safe and comfortable relations between the two countries. His arrogance was increased. He was the type of man who instinctively rebels against the greater authority. He was sensitive and not a little apt to take offence at purely friendly gestures. His blind courage made him the natural rebel. It was a trait in the character of the man, and no amount of wise counsel would have persuaded him to bow to the inevitable. Was it to be wondered at, therefore, that when he left England's shores, to be honoured and fêted in exactly the same manner by other European countries, he left with a vague sense of grievance, the envy of the inferiority complex, and the resolution that he would show that he could not be patronised ?

Great Britain is probably the wisest among the European nations in her treatment of Orientals. Long experience in the East, and the ability to call on some of the knowledgeable brains in the East, has given her a position and a poise when dealing with powerful Orientals that might well be imitated by other nations. Except for the regrettable new policy of toadying to temporary pundits, which has been evident during the last few years, the history of England's treatment of these sensitive, deep-thinking, and long-remembering people has

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been excellent. No nation is more adept at calling a bluff. No Government is more tactful in the treatment of foreign religious practices or prejudices.

But in the case of Amanullah there was surely shown a lack of foresight, an exaggeration of minor details, and an inability to see the major dangers, that seriously threatens that reputation held so dearly by the Foreign Office and the King's advisers.

As it happened, the effect was nullified by history. All Europe was in the same boat in regard to the treatment of Amanullah, though Great Britain, as the responsible Power, most directly. But if during the next few months history had not elected to nullify the issue, the London visit of King Amanullah might have been the direct cause of further and more prolonged trouble in the East.

CHAPTER VIII

I GO TO KABUL—A LONG ROAD IN A HOT SUN—"BARRED TO JOURNALISTS"—STRANGE BEHAVIOUR OF A CHAUFFEUR—A FORSAKEN VILLAGE

EVERY word of Amanullah's in Europe ; every visit he made to a statesman, a king, or a politician ; every formal trip he undertook to factories of arms, of aeroplanes, of tanks and ships of war ; and every speech made to him in flattery by the elect of the Western world ; all were faithfully reported back to his friends and his enemies in the East.

The Afghan Ministers in India hastily and unequivocally denied rumour that sought to suggest that there was trouble brewing in Kabul. Every minor politician interested in the new policy of Afghanistan sought to outdo his neighbour in inspired prophecies of the future. The mass of propaganda, of which a large proportion was actually accredited, formed the greatest ballyhoo campaign that has ever been conducted for the furtherance or fall of a nation.

There was, however, so far no serious hint of trouble in Kabul. The rumour seemed to have been false. Kabul was quiet, and the legations in the East reported progress and prosperity over all the land.

I decided to see for myself.

It seemed, however, that to obtain a visa for visiting Afghanistan was not a mere matter of applying for it. In spite of the encouragement said to be given to tourists, it proved to be a different matter when a newspaper reporter wished to make the trip. Even the British

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authorities at first combined with the Afghan Legation in discouraging me from the project. "Though Afghan gates be open," they indicated, "and visitors are welcome, that does not mean that the invitation includes an interfering and probably critical journalist. . . ."

The Afghan Minister in India, indeed, put his thoughts into words. In a letter refusing my application, he intimated that though every facility was given for information, the Afghan Government could not agree to a journalist obtaining a visa, even though, on the advice of a friend in Simla, I had stated that I was going for "sight-seeing only."

That letter was his undoing. In print, it would look strange. The threat of printing it in an Indian paper was enough to have the visa duly stamped within a few days. But the struggle had taken six weeks altogether.

It was the same at Peshawar. Having booked a seat on the weekly mail lorry which roars up the Khyber and over the Frontier, I was informed at the Customs Post that my passport lacked one important visa still. At Landi Kotal, headquarters of the Intelligence Staff of the Khyber Pass, they regretted that a new order had been made. It was to the effect that no Englishmen could be allowed to cross into Afghanistan. There was, it seemed, trouble in the air.

The order had been made at the last minute expressly to stop my entry into Afghanistan. It was a decision made in Simla, and telegraphed to Peshawar while I was on the way. Its insistence seemed to make it all the more essential that I go to Kabul immediately.

I went the next morning. An unsuspecting official, just back from leave, had not received the new order. He had the necessary stamp, and my passport soon had the new hieroglyphics which ensured safe passage over the Frontier.

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Passing Landi Kotal, I managed to keep away from interfering British officials. The *babu* at the Frontier was surprised but resigned.

“You are taking great trouble to go to Kabul,” he said.

He was right. I was.

So that black and white wooden barrier between the barbed wire of the Frontier lifted, and we were through, leaving behind a minor turmoil in official ranks because someone had blundered. But it was no longer my concern. When the red tape of officialdom becomes hopelessly knotted, then the reporter sometimes laughs. . . .

It was burning hot that August morning. No rain had come in the north, and though the clouds came sometimes low enough to promise rain, for the most part the sun shone with a terrific heat that struck back from the bare road and the treeless countryside, and seemed to pierce the eyes with its rays.

The American touring car bumped and swayed over a roughly-made road. Sitting in the back, I was already having difficulty in keeping my head from striking the hood at every chain of potholes. But the driver was impassive and calm. “This,” he said, “is the good part of the road. Later on, it is not so good.”

Before two hours had passed, I was already to gain an insight into the strange conditions in this strange country. The driver, an Indian, had begun his journey in a comfortable *dhoti* and jacket, with a voluminous *puggaree* on his head. Then he stopped the car, and rummaged in the tool-box.

“Dacca,” he said laconically, and began to transform himself into the perfect imitation of an Eastern gentleman “gone Western.”

He pulled on khaki trousers. He replaced his loose sandals with cheap brown American shoes with bulging

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toes. He stowed the *puggaree* in the tool-box and clapped a new, upturned and incongruous felt hat on the top of his head. Our little party was going Western with a vengeance.

Dacca was the reason. We swept round the elbow of the hills, and saw the village. It was not more than a collection of mud-huts, but it represented the outpost of officialdom. It was to be my first taste of the new Afghan business methods. Scattering the pi-dogs that yapped and barked their protest, we drew up before a tall, rambling mud and thatch house that seemed to be the centre of the village.

“The *Sahib* will perhaps wait,” said the driver, and took his papers into the house.

The *Sahib* did wait. The village madman came to do a turn round the car, begging for alms and whining as he offered his skeleton arm for money. The pi-dogs slunk nearer. The village children, lank hair over the shoulders, crowded round for a sight of the *feringhe*. The *Sahib* still waited.

The driver came out. “Ten rupees,” he said. Then he went back. The *Sahib* waited again.

And eventually I went into the first Customs Post in Afghanistan, was offered a chair, and watched while the worldly goods of a stout and voluble Afghan merchant were strewn over the room, while the half-dozen *babus* did intricate sums on large papers in green ink, and while eventually the chief Customs *babu* and the merchant haggled over the duty owing to His Majesty’s Government, or, alternatively, to himself.

I waited half an hour and profited amazingly. Then they turned to me. I realised that the ten rupees had done its work. Seven and sixpence (for the Afghan rupee is worth half the Indian rupee) was worth while, when it is considered that without this initial payment the traveller

can wait all day before he has his baggage passed. And, through the driver, I explained that I was bringing nothing into the country which could be sold.

They must have proof of that. Efficiency was the keynote (and I had only paid ten rupees). Their duty to the Government was to be thorough (and I had only paid ten rupees). Bring in, therefore, the traveller's goods.

Coolies, pouncing on the car, dragged out suitcase, bedding roll, and typewriter. The *babus*, rummaging through the bag, produced pyjamas (no doubt a disguise), shirts (indubitably to sell to the Kabulis), and other domestic needs equally incriminating.

Then they inspected the typewriter.

Was it mine ? It was.

Was it new ? It was not.

Was it for sale ? Over my dead and quivering body.

Was it old, then ? It was patriarchal.

Was I, then, going to write about Afghanistan ? Compliments only, particularly about the Dacca Customs Post. . . .

Then another ten rupees appeared from the driver's pocket. The suitcase, the bedding roll, and the typewriter disappeared swiftly back into the car. I was free, and honour was satisfied. Wonderful Afghanistan !

There was, it is true, a little trouble about the number plates before we got away. The driver had been on this route for a year or more, and on every journey had had trouble with the number plates. They were, apparently, out of date. The car was not paying tax to the Government at the full rate. What to do, said the Customs *babu*, as obviously the car could not proceed on its journey, and I must stay in Dacca, perhaps for days, perhaps for ever. . . . What to do ?

The driver's face suddenly lit up with inspiration.

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It had lit up with inspiration at the same moment at the same place twice a week for six weeks. He was suddenly relieved of the burden of care with which this difficulty had saddled him.

“ Perhaps five rupees . . . ? ” he hinted.

No. His Afghan Majesty’s servants could not be bribed.

“ But ten rupees . . . ? ”

Honour was satisfied, and we went our way.

Just out of the village, the road ended. That, at any rate, was how it looked to me. The tiny wall of loose stones at the side of the rough track, however, seemed to continue, and along here the driver proceeded steadily, often slowing down to walking pace and bumping over the deep holes in the surface, unrepaired since last year’s rains had swept over the deep holes.

We were following the dry bed of a stream, and more than once crossed it on a frail bridge of sticks and stones and the boughs of trees. Ahead, there loomed the hills, and on either side we were frowned on by the first sentinels of the great range of snow-covered mountains. The old car stumbled on, every joint and coupling creaking and complaining.

“ We have done well,” said the driver. “ It is best to hasten things through the Dacca Customs. But it costs money. We shall reach Jallalabad for the night, and it will be cooler.”

A hundred miles the first long day ! That was speed for you ! Since the new roads were made, this being one, things had indeed changed in Afghanistan for the tourists !

We were now seldom in top gear, and the car was a blazing and quivering body of hot metal, burning to the touch. I clung to the struts supporting the hood, carefully keeping my hands off any piece of metal that was

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in the sunshine. Even with those precautions, my head often struck the top of the hood, at ten miles an hour.

“ This is the beginning of the bad piece of the road to Kabul,” said the driver. He had dispensed by now with the trappings of the West, assumed for the benefit of the highly Westernised Customs gentlemen. He had slipped off his trousers, and donned his *dhoti* for coolness. The amazing little hat had gone back into the tool-box. His head was protected and comfortable in his *puggaree*.

Another inspiration caused the light to shine in his impassive face.

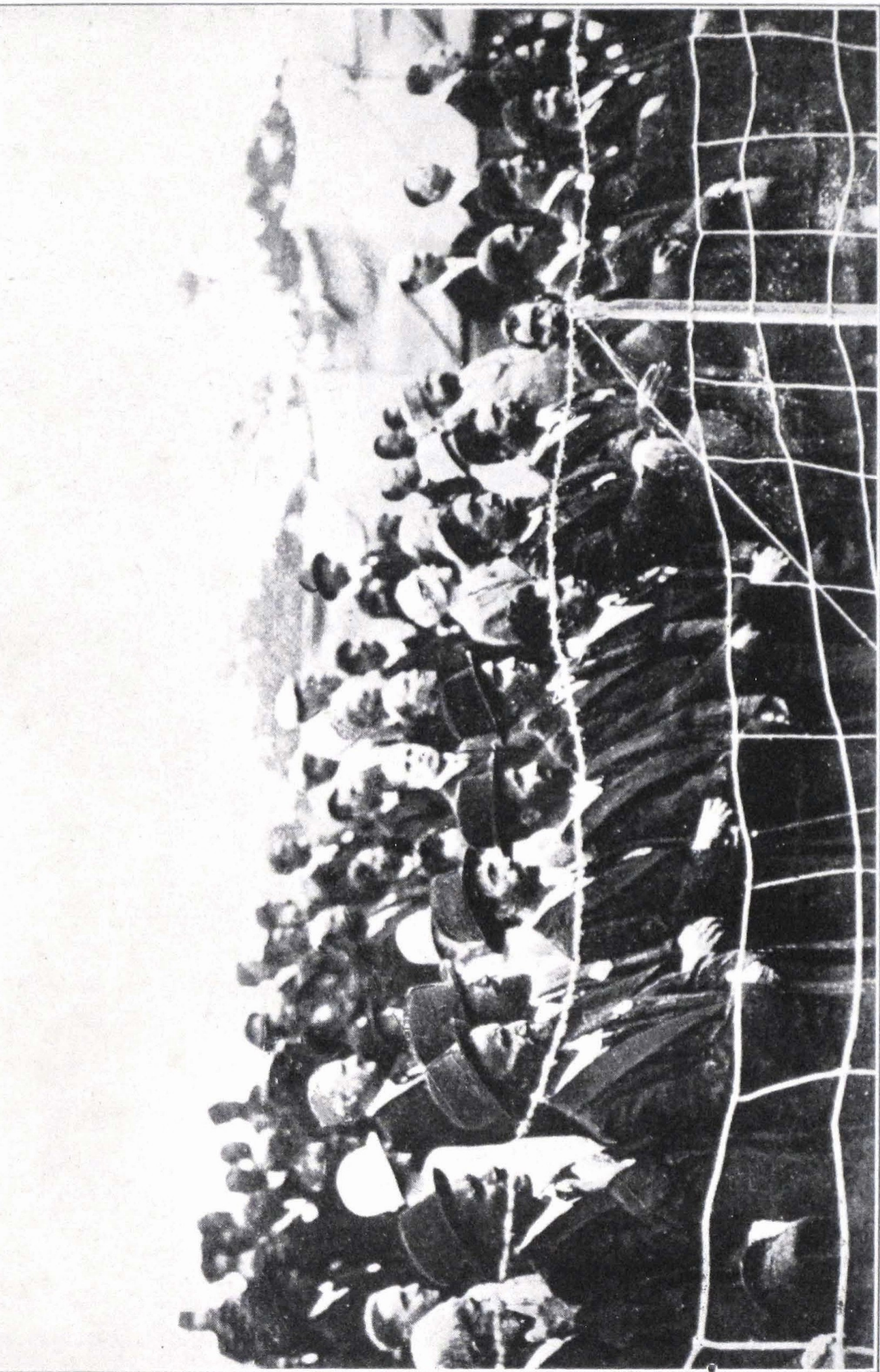
“ Perhaps the *Sahib* wishes to sit in the front,” he said. “ It is less bumpy, and if the *Sahib* allows, I will take passengers in the back to weigh the car down.”

He had discovered the great secret of comfortable motor travel in the East, though whether the coach-builders would approve is another matter.

So we picked up passengers. We found them in the next village, resting on their journey. They were real men of the hills, two of them marching to Kabul with a small boy. They had bundles slung on their backs, and a little brightly coloured tin box. After a short conversation, no doubt financially beneficial to the driver, they disposed themselves in the back of the car, lounged back in utter comfort and happiness, and served their purpose admirably as ballast.

The change was for the better. As we turned towards the first of the gradients outside the village, the car seemed to be ploughing its way through the network of holes with greater equilibrium and less discomfort, at least for the weary, shaken, and sweating front-seat passenger.

At two o'clock, we stopped at a tiny hamlet on the



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road for rest. The rocks now shimmered in the heat. The very leather of the seats was hot. The brilliant light glanced upward and penetrated, it seemed, the brain. The bare hills were screened by no trees. Even the hardy scrub was withered and drooping. It seemed the land that God forgot.

At the side of the road was the samovar shop. A rude, tumbledown verandah, and a window from which there hung a matting cover. There was at first no sign of activity, but at the sound of the car a man came out of the back room and stood upon his doorstep. The driver climbed stiffly out of the driving-seat, and the "ballast" tumbled out of the back, their bundles dropping into the road.

Their cheerfulness did not forsake them at sight of the sparse comfort of the café. They entered gaily and demanded hot bowls of tea and thick slabs of bread. Conversation with the owner was brisk and loud, and I could see by the frequent pointings that I was honoured by being their chief topic.

I pulled out the water-skin and the packet of food that the genial Mr. Gai, Parsi grocer of Peshawar and general man of knowledge of all things Afghan, had made up for me. It was stale and tasteless, and the water was hot. But the fare seemed better than the refreshment in the café.

On the other side of the road there was a round, slime-covered pond. The local cow stood in the water up to the knees. The sores on her back were open, and her tail was nearly twisted from the body by the persuasive tactics of the cowherds. By and by there came an Afghan boy, leading on a rope a limping pi-dog, without the spirit of a bark in its throat. Slowly and thoughtfully the boy began throwing stones at the wretch, lazily and methodically, while he still held on to the rope. Now and again

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his attention would drift from his strange pastime to the car, and its *feringhe* passenger. The only sound was the occasional yelp of the pi-dog as the boy's aim proved true.

More yellow dogs appeared. They were the sturdy, savage type of the Afghan village, with bristling throats and eyes with the glint of rabies ever in the pupils. After the first interest in the car, they turned to more profitable work, and began tearing and biting at the gruesome entrails of a horse which lay just outside the mud café. A fight developed, and the café owner, cursing and savage in his action, hurled a huge stone at the nearest, crippling its hind leg. The dogs slunk away, dragging with them the long streamers of innards from the decomposing horse. The driver and the "ballast passengers" laughed and joked, and I ate half the chicken, washed down with the hot water.

The village had an atmosphere of terrible depression. We had driven into the Dark Ages of mankind. Nothing had changed there, save for the solitary sentinels of the telegraph posts, since time began. Man still dug a meagre living from the harsh and unmerciful soil. He housed himself with the mud of his backyard. He clothed himself in the skins of the animals he shot, and sometimes paid for a garment made by the village weaver on his old-fashioned loom.

He lived in a state of filth and disease little removed from the lower animals. He was born with cruelty in his heart, and died with blind ignorance in his brain. Perhaps a ray of humour came to stir his dormant soul now and then, but apart from that, no thought of beauty, no sentiment, no inspiring ambition, and no satisfaction entered into his heart. Mind was always stationary, though body moved about its business.

The misery of that village terrified me. It seemed the

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end of the world. It seemed as if it would be mercy if the great hills moved one day, ground their sides together, and exterminated the sole visible haunt of man, pulverising the scene of his degradation, cruelty, and ignorance. Its history should be shown to those who decry, so decoratively and logically, the advances of civilisation. The so-called evils of modernity had never penetrated, and might never penetrate, to this God-forsaken corner of a harsh and cruel land.

But the driver and the "ballast" seemed pleased enough, and after giving the engine water, they tumbled in and the back-breaking journey began once more. We were climbing at last, and the road improved a little as it wound round the shoulders of the hills, leaving below us that hamlet in which I seemed to have reviewed all the evil of the East.

We saw mule trains, far below us in the valleys, making their slow way along the old tracks that lead by the side of the trickling streams. We saw one or two road-menders, sitting under improvised shelters from the sun. They had erected sticks and thrown over them their coats. Under this they hammered at the stones, breaking off their work to watch us go by, and cursing us as the dust flew up behind and blinded them. Near each man was leaning his rifle.

The long line of telegraph poles led straight up the side of the hills. It was the link with the Western world, and over its wires had come many messages to the British Government which decided history in Afghanistan. It was, I heard, an object of considerable hostility from the Afghans of these parts, who considered it presumption for a wire to be laid across the country merely that the hated foreigners could talk to each other.

Then we came to a blockhouse, high up on the side of the road, where there was a company of Afghan troops,

guarding the road that was said to be, for the first time in history, safe for every traveller. The soldiers could be seen on the verandah, dead in sleep.

We stopped again in a big *serai*, redolent of camel dung, where the driver bought melons and advised me to try one. It was tasteless but cooling, and a vast improvement on the hot water now running short. It was only afterwards that I heard that fruit in Afghanistan is very liable to be infected with cholera. Other reports, however, deny this, averring that there is less likelihood of the disease than in the fruit of India. Then, in the late afternoon, we climbed higher on the road to Jallalabad.

The passengers were now singing. The chant had begun with a low crooning from the big bearded fellow. Now his friend had taken it up, and later the small boy. It developed in volume, until the same monotonous song, low and toneless, seeming to have unexpected endings and cadences, was being roared over the peaceful valley. I did not understand the words, for this was Pushtu, but I was assured later that there is hardly an Afghan song that does not refer either to obstetrics, love, or war. A fine choice there is, therefore, and certainly the trio seemed to enjoy it.

We dropped again from the hills in the dusk, and the road took us through cornfields. It seemed to be a particularly self-willed road by now, for it did not run straight for more than fifty yards at a time, and every bend was concealed by the long stalks of the crops. We were running through the fields, the road being diverted, I suppose, for the convenience of the farmers. But soon after dusk the driver announced that we were in the outskirts of Jallalabad.

The bazaar was strangely crowded. There were flaring lights and the stalls were glamorous in the glare of

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naphtha flames. The main street was half covered with a patchwork quilt of sacking and wicker. It must have kept out the sun at midday, but at night the fumes made the little street noxious. Fruit was everywhere. There were piles of rich green and yellow and red apples, and melons and sweet grapes. We stopped, to deliver a note to a stall-keeper from the driver's master, and I indicated a big bunch of grapes and held out a handful of coins. The dealer took the smallest, and poured back into my hand a shower of square and bent and misshapen coins. The grapes, I found out, cost little more than a penny a bunch, and were the staple food of beggars. We were in an upside-down land.

The city was a complete contrast to the village in the hills. The dealers and the shoppers were cheerful and gay in their dress, and seemed ever ready with a laugh and a greeting. The townspeople were taking what seemed to be their evening leisure and sauntered from stall to stall, where there were displayed all the finery and the products that they could wish to buy. A rich, thriving city, it seemed, and I was almost sorry when we drove through it towards the new Government Rest House.

Except for the Customs at Dacca, this was the first manifestation I had had of the new régime under Amanullah. Counting on the inrush of visitors who would wish to journey to Kabul, he had wisely placed their accommodation under the wing of the Government, and though the scheme could never have been a paying proposition, his efforts for the comfort of those who were seeing his country must have been well appreciated. They certainly were by one traveller, that August night, when the prospect of rest seemed delicious, and the wide verandah of the bungalow gave a simple but ample welcome.

There were already some visitors for the night, Afghan officers who were journeying the other way. They were walking in the pleasant compound, and made haste to call the servants when I got out of the car. They were haughty but amiable, and I found that their seeming superiority to me was a strange form of self-consciousness. For they were in the full regalia of their uniforms, and the tight boots, resplendent jackets, and shakos might well have caused some embarrassment.

The subject of dinner came up. My driver, who had by now appointed himself the leader of this party, made the arrangements. With something like triumph, he announced that dinner would be ready in half an hour. There would be the inevitable chicken (I saw the cook's boy chasing furiously about the courtyard after another victim) and fruit. Would that suit? It would suit very well.

The half hour was, of course, a figure of speech. At the end of that time one of the serving boys came out into the garden, and placed a table and a hurricane-lamp in the centre of the lawn. It was immediately surrounded by a thick flying mass of winged insects.

In another quarter of an hour he produced a few spoons, forks, and a solitary knife. Then a chair. Lastly, an empty salt-cellar. I took another illegal swig of neat whisky from a flask (illegal because I had faithfully promised the Customs in Dacca that I had brought no spirits with me to "dry" Afghanistan) and waited for what the night might bring.

At the end of an hour and a quarter the chicken *pillau* arrived. The flies had a great time.

The night was very quiet. Only now and then there would begin a fierce yapping and barking, and sometimes the long human cry of a jackal, scavenging on the outskirts of the city. The mosquitoes made a continual

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buzz all night, but as I lay on the hard bed in the compound, smoking, the night seemed cool, and I nearly fell asleep with the cigarette still burning in my fingers. And the first light of dawn came up to arouse me before the early morning chorus of birds. It was fresh and windy, and for the first time I saw the tawdriness and the half-Western architecture of Amanullah's first attempt at Westernisation—the rest-house. But it had given me a good and a comfortable night, and except for the aching of stiff limbs I had forgotten the agony of that motor journey over the hills. The Afghan officers had already gone.

We were not long in following them. The "ballast" party were already sitting in the car, anxious to be off to Kabul. The driver was examining the tired wreck of his vehicle, and was bedecked in his "Western clothes."

"Why do you wear it?" I asked him, looking at that absurd hat perched on the top of his head.

"It does not please me," he said with a smile, "but it seems to please the officials. One has to be careful to please the officials in Afghanistan these days. . . ."

Off we went, after paying a small bill for lodging, and signing my name and occupation in the record book. "Journalist on sight-seeing tour," I wrote, remembering the injunctions of my friend in Simla.

Up and up we climbed away from the fair city of Jallalabad, but before we left its confines we stopped a moment outside the walls of the Winter Palace of Amanullah. It was a strange mixture of pretentiousness and simplicity. Its colours were vivid and staring in the bright morning light. It had spacious gardens that promised coolness and relief from the dry yellow plains and rocks, and was well irrigated. I was not to know, then, that in the fair city of Jallalabad, and round the

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walls of the Palace itself, there would soon rage the mob that began the end of this strange chapter of Eastern history.

Up and up we went, looking over the precipices and skirting the outer ridges of the road as we went. The road was well engineered, but still the surface was appalling, and the back-seat passengers had their songs choked in their throats if they ever contemplated another burst of high spirits. There were more fords and bridges, and more than once the driver had to force his way over obstructions, where the road-menders were clearing away landslips and huge boulders that had fallen down the cliff-side.

It grew cooler every minute, until, at the top of the plateau we had been mounting, a keen wind blew across the road, delightful and invigorating. We stopped the car for water, at one of the springs at the side of the road, indicated by a notice board that Amanullah had been at pains to erect for motorists.

Towards noon we stopped again, this time at the command of a huge, signalling figure in the centre of the road. We saw him from some way off, on the down slope of a long gradient. He seemed strangely clad from a distance. And as we got nearer, I saw that he was a European, very tanned and swarthy, with the unmistakable features of an Italian.

He was dressed in mechanic's clothes, with the addition of Afghan top-boots. His hands were oily and his face was begrimed and sweating. When he had halted us, he climbed on to the running-board and bade us drive down the hill. Then we saw his trouble. A huge military transport van, with the mark of an Italian firm on its bonnet, but the Afghan Army marks on its flank, was at the side of the road, its bonnet open and the legs of another mechanic, similarly clad, appearing from the

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depths of the engine. The Italian hopped off and waved us good-bye. So Amanullah was having his teething troubles already with mechanics. The first of his precious Western imports had broken down.

Through the day we drove, stopping once for melons and another dig at the now mangled chicken. We were still averaging ten miles an hour. Nightfall, said the driver, should get us to Kabul.

“Insh’Allah!” said the passengers. For the first time I heard the word which epitomises the Afghan fatalism and psychology. For “Insh’Allah” means “If Allah is willing,” or “perhaps.” It is the first word in the vocabulary of the true Afghan.

It can cover the aching or the joyful heart. If used after a disappointment, it resigns the mind to the fatality of this life. Allah did not wish it. Therefore it could not happen.

If used after sudden good news, it differs by a shade in its interpretation. “God is good,” it implies. “Therefore this came to pass.”

It is an excuse, a reason, an apology, a shifting of the blame, an oath, an avowal of sincerity, and a protest of unbelief. It is a reproach to wickedness and an urge to piety. Fortunate the language that has such a word! For with it much of Afghan history can be understood.

But to-day, the doubt in the other passengers’ minds was groundless. Their “Insh’Allah,” however, was equally applicable. For as the last light went out of the sky, and the clouds were hung with the scarlet banners suitable to the sun’s departure, the driver touched my arm and said quietly: “Ahead is Kabul.”

There was a whoop of joy from the ballast passengers. The little boy stood up on the seat the better to



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look. They began a discussion that lasted us well into the city.

But their most revealing and eloquent expression consisted of one word.

It was the bearded man who spoke when he saw Kabul City down below. "Insh'Allah . . ." he said.

CHAPTER IX

IN A KABUL HOTEL—THE TRAGEDY OF SIGNOR PIERRI—
“THE GREAT HOUR”—SECRETS OF THE COURT—A RIDE
IN THE ROYAL MOTOR CAR

BUT before we had actually entered Kabul, we were to undergo one more experience with new and tangled Afghan red tape. In preparation, the car stopped once more, after spirited conversation between the driver and the ballast, for which the latter seemed duly grateful.

We had run from the top of the hill through a cañon whose sides reared themselves straight and bare for a hundred feet. The road curled perilously and swung round hairpin bends to the bridge over Kabul River, here a rushing torrent as it was forced through the bottle-neck. The driver pulled into a clearing, and there began a performance which would have caused a flutter in the heart of a Customs agent in any country.

The driver once more changed *puggaree* and *dhoti* for comic hat and trousers. His discarded garments he stuffed carefully into the tool-box, together with sundry mysterious parcels which I guessed were to run the gauntlet of the Customs inspection.

But far more ambitious and elaborate were the preparations made in the back of the car for the benefit of the officials. The road seemed crowded indeed with struggling figures, wrapping themselves up in new clothes, binding *puggarees*, replacing old shoes for new.

The large bearded man who so often and so reverently entrusted his soul to the keeping of Allah was now

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taking other steps. He had already four waistcoats, of brilliant hue, enclosing his mighty chest. He had changed his shoes for sparkling new creations of worked leather, their toes pointing to heaven. The old ones he stuffed into his sleeves. Then he hung around his swarthy neck a very feminine row of beads, intended to grace more swanlike shoulders, and undoubtedly not meant to gleam through the tresses of a thick black beard. Lastly, he hid a further packet in the folds of his new *puggaree*, while the old one he folded round his waist.

The small boy carried on his person equally dutiable goods. He had been wearing an old and greasy skull cap, smaller than a woman's *béret*, on the back of his head. This he threw away, and proceeded to decorate his head with a selection of coloured and shiny caps of the same shape, which, I knew, had been bought in Peshawar City. The caps made a little dome on his head. They were easily noticeable even to the unpractised eye. But to conceal them he wrapped a new *puggaree* round his head, and surveyed himself anew.

He had on new clothes over his travelling garments. His trousers, white and voluminous, stuck out in virgin stiffness. He was wearing four waistcoats, of brilliant texture, and as he moved he sweated profusely in the damp and clammy atmosphere.

So with the third passenger. Evidently I was an unwitting accomplice to a band of amateur smugglers. Then we got into the car, which seemed suddenly to have grown much smaller, and rattled down the hill to the Customs post.

The smugglers need not have taken such trouble to conceal their new goods. As it happened, negotiations were concluded with the smart Afghan Customs officer on the other side of the bridge with more celerity

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than was the case at Dacca. But naturally enough, this being near the capital, the price was higher. Twenty rupees it cost me, and we chugged through to the long straight road that led to the old gates of the city.

The road was chock-a-block with farm carts returning to Kabul for the night. They were loaded up with grain and other goods, and the poor bullocks strained and stumbled under the weight and the rain of blows that fell on their heads. The dusk was filled with the ghastly thud of stout staves on the bowed heads of the beasts as the carts rumbled on great wooden wheels into the city, carving a rut in the soft road as they went. They swayed unsteadily, the course of the labouring teams diverted by the methodical tail-twisting that urged them on.

“Ai!” called the drivers, sitting on the poles and reviling their beasts with the lurid wit of the East. “Ai! Ai!” The thuds provided a fiendish chorus into Kabul.

It was nearly dark when we ran through the old gate in the battlements, and old Bala Hissar, the ruined fortress, was only a dim shape. The lights were up in the city, and the bazaar was swarming with people. We kept out of the inner city, however, and encircled the town on a new, ruddy road that was wide and provided with pavement stones. Our first stop, after depositing the jubilant and grateful ballast passengers near the city, was the British Legation.

I stopped the car outside the gate and presented myself to the guardroom. The tall cavalry trooper with the ink-black beard saluted, and let me in. From there I was escorted to an office of the Legation. A young secretary to the Legation, in civilian clothes, came out of his room.

“Hello,” he greeted me. “You’re not supposed to be here, you know. The wires have been buzzing with

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news of you. What do you mean by it, and will you have tea or whisky and soda ? ”

It was a great welcome, and over the cool drink he told me how red tape in the Khyber Pass had been further entangled because I had got through owing to an official mistake.

There would be no accommodation for me at the Legation. As I was a journalist and therefore not very popular, the British Legation could not offer me any facilities or amenities. I must do the best I could without their help. There was an hotel in Kabul, it was said. . . .

We drove to the hotel, newly built and quite large. The proprietor was even then sitting in the dusty garden, consuming a drink of amazing and rich colour. After a little time I joined him, and learnt that there would be prepared a room on the first floor.

The driver left, and my bags were taken upstairs by an old serving man. The room, when I inspected it, was dusty and smelt of stale air. It contained a bed and a washing-stand, and when I threw open the window to let in the night air, another cloud of dust blew into the room. The bed was rusty and the blankets obviously second-hand. There was a bell, with the air of all bells which do not work, and when I had yelled for assistance, new bedclothes eventually arrived and, after another long wait, cold water.

Food, it was said by the proprietor, who spoke a little Hindustani, would be served in an hour.

Washed and rid of much of the dust of the journey, though it had crept through every covering and into every particle of clothing in my bag, I went downstairs. The gloomy hall was deserted, but in the dining-room there was a little company of men in European clothes. Their laughter echoed over the hotel. Their chatter was

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brisk and sustained. They were Italians, in the service of the Afghan Government, waiting for the work that never came and idling their time away in an alien land that they hated.

There was an ex-colonel in the Italian cavalry, who seemed the chief spokesman of the group. Speaking in French, he invited me to join the party. They were curious, and interested in my journey. They took existence as a joke. "We have a great time," they said. "Look how we are enjoying ourselves, in this lovely hotel, with such lovely women all around us, such cheap drinks, such charming natives, and such congenial company. . . ."

And they looked ruefully at the empty tables before them, at the bare and dirty walls of the depressing room, and surveyed their own loneliness—and thirst.

I was to make a friend among them whom I shall always remember. He was sitting silent, on a hard chair, his eyes mournful and plaintive. He introduced himself to me, lifting a wide, black hat that seemed out of place in that ugly room.

"I am Signor Pierri," he said. "I speak English. I am a wireless engineer in the service of the Afghan Government, but there is no wireless."

Thus having delightfully played the host, he raised his hat again, bowed, and continued to regard the floor with a sombre expression.

All these men were pathetic outcasts from their native boulevards, existing in a city to which they would never grow acclimatised. They sadly lacked every amenity to which they had become accustomed. They had no work and no recreation. The Italian cavalry colonel fumed and swore in his exasperation. His grey beard wagged as he chattered. Not all of them were even so placid as he.

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Amanullah had been back some little time. Yes, great things were expected of Afghanistan, now that the King had been to Europe. It was even hoped that they would one day get their pay. . . .

There were one or two Germans in the little party that sat down to dinner that night. There was a Chinese merchant, and two big Russians in the uniform of the Afghan Air Force. They, at any rate, had something to do. There were two German women, wives of Afghan officers who were away in the country. They were blonde, stout, and typical townspeople, gathered, one would say at a glance, from the suburbs of some big city by a keen young Afghan who had been taking his military training in Germany. This hotel, this damp room, was the realisation of the colourful dreams of the East which they had believed. This hotel was the end of the journey. They longed once more for the lights of civilisation.

We picked the least unappetising food and ate it. One must eat.

The place was thick in dust and dirt. It was Afghanistan's best hotel.

The next morning I went with Signor Pierri to the old city. We dived once more into the labyrinthian streets, but afterwards wandered round the great hostels where lived the young Russian clerks and secretaries. We saw the railway station, still in the hands of the workmen. We looked at Kabul River, carrying the putrefaction of one of the dirtiest cities in the world under its bridges.

"There is little to do here," said Pierri. "There is no life, no gaiety, just nothing to do. I wish I were back in Rome. . . ."

His clothes, in that evil city of the East, had not been affected by his few months' stay. He dressed with the

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same care he had taken when preparing for a stroll to his favourite café in his native town. He was always formally dressed, scrupulously polite, *tiré a quatre épingles*. Signor Pierri, I feared, was not the type of an Empire builder. . . .

Amanullah had come back. It was impossible to ignore the effect in Kabul. The bazaar was seething with rumour packed on rumour. There were lively discussions in the shops, in the streets, in the *serais*, and the samovar shops. Officials had risen with a new spirit of energy and attention to their affairs. Even the police had girded their loins and swaggered through Kabul with more resounding cuffs for the loiterers, more frantic arguments with the drivers of mule teams, more summary convictions and fines for the transgressors of the law.

Amanullah was back. Tales were being told of his dash across the mountain roads from the Northern Frontier; of his outpacing of the cars containing his suite; of his anxiety to be back at the helm of Government; of the way the hillmen had first heard a roar through the mountains, then seen a cloud of dust, and then seen a flash of silver, as Amanullah, at the wheel of a long sleek Rolls Royce, had shot over the rough mountain roads, bumped over the rough bridges crossing the streams, eventually swung into Kabul, dusty and fatigued.

Kabul was electrified with a new spirit. There was a new tension about the Palace. What next, what next? For in the midst of a chaotic time, when the finances seemed to stagger under the load, these vast changes still continued and the men of Kabul were not content with a mere marking time. What next in Afghanistan?

In the midst of the scurry at the Palace, I still found an amiable and leisurely individual who sought my

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presence. He was a minor giant in the administration. He was a little god in his realm. For he was Ram Prasad, magnificent in white breeches and shako, His Majesty's specially imported head chauffeur and chief of the garage, hired from British India.

Ram Prasad was a philosopher and a wit, and, benefiting by the freedom of speech in a neutral country, he addressed me familiarly and affectionately as "my dear man," later shortening it into an embarrassing "my dear." . . .

I took his photograph standing in front of the line of glittering cars over which he had command. He repaid my flattering and interest by playing taxi-man to me, taking out the cars for my use whenever I needed them, and causing endless trouble to the British Legation once, when I arrived there magnificently in the back of the black Rolls Royce which had been a gift from King George of England to King Amanullah of Afghanistan.

For when the King went to the Legation, these days, he went there unobtrusively and quietly. . . .

With Ram Prasad at the wheel of the sporting Rolls which had been Amanullah's wonder chariot over the northern hills, I toured the outlying roads of the city, and once drove the sleek car full out along the wide rough road. Amanullah never knew how his car was being used by a mere English journalist, and the secret died with Ram Prasad a month later.

Ram Prasad told me many secrets of the Court. He knew a lot. As it turned out, he knew too much. He died violently, but still garbed, I hope, in those wonderful white breeches and high polished boots.

The best view of the new order in Kabul, however, was in the outskirts of the old city, or just outside the humble hotel where I was staying. There was the

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boundary line between two worlds. There met the incoming traders from the hills and the modernised shopkeepers and merchants of old Kabul. That was an arena where two ages met and stared in wonder.

Down the long road from the north, there would come a daily procession of caravan traders. They would sit astride their lean-shanked ponies, with their rifles aslant over their broad shoulders. Their saddles were heaped rugs and pads of leather. There was coloured work in their harness, and heavy iron stirrups, with protective skins to keep the cold of winter from their shanks. Their *puggarees* were voluminous and generous. Their waistcoats gaudy and loose, trousers of white hanging down in wide folds to their green and red and yellow sandals.

They would rein in their ponies and stare at the new Kabul. At the policeman at the crossroads, in a smart new cap of modern design, jacket, puttees, and—wonder of all—boots. They would spare a glance for the burly Russian Air Force mechanics, perpetually sitting in the garden of the hotel. They would look at electric lights, paved streets, and wide avenues and new shops, showing advertisements of new Western products, with the eyes of the unbelieving.

Was this the new Kabul of which they had heard? The travellers were not lying for once, then!

Then they would kick their ponies into a trot, call to their laden mules, and stare fiercely ahead as they made their way to the old city.

Even then, they were not past their wonderment and their troubles. For the point-duty policeman would shout and revile them. He would stand in their way and call them dolts, louts, ignorant animals. Did they not know that in modern Kabul traffic must keep to the left of the road? They did not know. They had never

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heard such ridiculous talk ! Nevertheless, they kept to the left.

The Afghan was already being chafed by the chains of civilisation.

But after a day or so I went up the road in the King's car to Paghman, and moved into the other hotel run by the Government.

It was just as bad. Its rooms had that same stale air of their last occupants. Its staircase, ornate, but with the paint chipping, was as dirty and as dreary. The food and the service were as poor. The Afghan boys as insolent and slow and stupid. Hotel-keeping had not been a success. That much was evident already.

The place, however, was heavenly. The air was cooler, until midday, when the sun grew to a heat that made me long for the shelter of even those dreary rooms. There would be a chill breeze at sundown, and in the dawn the dew would be fresh on the grass at the side of the steep road. I went long walks, up the sides of the surrounding hills, and right on the summit of the largest peak, came across an old mullah sitting beneath his wind-blown and tattered white flags, flying from twisted branches of trees.

He was gazing quite motionless on the new valley of Paghman. From his vantage-point, he could see the pennants waving from the Royal Palace, and the flags draping the trees in the gardens. He could see the pink cinema, and the gold and red of the café. He could see cars moving up the road to that favoured valley, followed by their little skirts of dust. Now and again, in the evening, he could hear the band playing the same old tune down in the gardens.

I wondered what he thought of it all. He did not move when I approached, and only when I stood in front of him did he turn his eyes to me. He did not

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understand when I took his photograph. Strange, this : I had thought that all the world by now knew the significance of the black telescopic box, and the smile on the face of the photographer.

But "Look pleasant, please !" meant nothing to the old mullah.

He did not speak when I said a word to him in Hindustani. I did not expect him to understand, but he did not even trouble to turn round when I said "Salaam !" as I left. He was looking at the strange phenomenon of the new Afghanistan.

Another interesting visit was to the Russian Legation. It was a modest, open, double-storeyed house off the road leading to the Palace, flying the flag of the sickle and hammer. There was a small annexe. The garden was unkempt.

I sent up a card, asking to see Stark, the Russian Minister at Kabul. The reply was a long time coming, but I knew the answer before I sent the card. The reply was brought by a dark young man with a pleasant smile. He spoke in French, and professed himself a journalist.

He was, it turned out, a representative of the *Pravda*. He knew a little English. Would I like to hear it ? I did, and it consisted of a strange sailor's jargon that he had picked up, he told me, when he was sailing from South America to Cardiff on a Welsh boat, after being thrown out of South America and preparatory to being thrown out of London with "Arcos." We found a subject in common, for the newspaper for which I was working had been instrumental in evicting that organisation.

It was impossible to imagine, he said, that I should see the Minister. Perhaps, however, since I was there, I would help him in a little matter ? I would, since

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he was a pleasant young man. And he unfolded his troubles.

In the annexe, it appeared, there was a particularly well-favoured young Russian girl with a gramophone. I did not know whether the course of love depended on the gramophone, but there had been a difficulty about a new American record which the girl had received. It was, said the young man, quite unintelligible to them, though they had played it over and over again, slowly and painstakingly, and had burrowed in many English dictionaries to find the meaning of the song. Would I help ?

Through the garden we went to the annexe, and the young man called out hopefully to an open window on the first floor. He had his reward.

There peeped out a mop of black hair, a pair of huge eyes, and a smiling red mouth. Long discussion followed, and the head disappeared.

Then the peace of the sunny afternoon was broken by the harsh twang of America. The strange words, smart and sophisticated, came ripping out to us in the garden. It was a mixture of the Bowery and the Bronx. It was almost unintelligible to English ears—at least ears that for some years had not been accustomed to the new universal language. But, as best I could, I told the Russian youth the meaning of the strange tune, sung by two nasal comedians, and the gist of their song was translated before me into Russian, to cause the black eyes above us to dance with merriment, the lips to part with laughter, and the black hair to shake with glee.

And that was all the information I got from the Russian Legation. The journalist thanked me, I thanked him, we thanked the girl, and we shook hands on it. I hope, at any rate, that love in the pleasant

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valley of Paghman progressed all the more smoothly because I had told them of the meaning of the song of two comedians. They had not long, these two, in which to pursue their sunlit courtship. My journalist was to be thrown out of yet another territory.

Regularly at six in the evening, I would meet Signor Pierri, who had come with me to Paghman. He would just have bathed after his midday sleep. He would come down the steps, treading daintily, the black eyes morose as ever, and his clothes still a civilised wonder in wild Asia. Solemnly he would take off his hat for me, cast a surprised eye over my shorts and khaki shirt (for I had no other clothes) and fall into step beside me.

It was three days before the annual celebration of Independence Day, August 1928. Great things were expected when that day dawned. The King was to speak, and it was thought that he would have something further to say of the programme for his kingdom. He would detail the events of the past few months, and tell the delegates to his annual *jirga*, or meeting, of the honours that had been heaped upon him in all the cities of the West.

Already, workmen were in the gardens sprucing up the lawns and the flower beds for the great day. The bandstand was having a new lick of paint. Ornamental signs were being hung on the triumphal arch which led to the road to the Palace. The flowers were bright in the sunshine, all the Government officials were on tenter-hooks, and all Kabul City, relic of the comfortable past, was filled with a slight nervous tension.

Walking with Pierri this afternoon, however, we are more concerned with the immediate chances of amusement than with the far-reaching possibilities of Independence Day.

“This,” says Pierri, with terrific irony, “this is the great hour in the Paghman day. There is a little life in the gardens this afternoon. We will do the best we can, in the circumstances, to amuse ourselves.”

With the little Italian, this means finding out where there are gathered the prettiest and most inviting-looking nursemaids and female employees of the Government. Having found them chattering in a little circle near the bandstand, we sit on the grass and gaze at them. Signor Pierri, undeterred by their obvious signs of displeasure, and by their eventual removal to the other side of the gardens, finds another group, and concentrates on curves and contours once more. He is irrepressible.

The fountains play, and the sunlight makes patterns in the falling water. Strange children, black and brown and yellow and pale, play in the dust. The chatter of the nurses is shrill. Only is there silence when we are near those groups of shrouded figures, walking mysteriously along, their faces and figures enveloped by the *purdah* robes.

There is a little crowd standing by the hard tennis court—a recent innovation. We go there, Pierri dragging his eyes unwillingly from a young Turkish girl, with a Parisian figure and knee-high skirts, who had just come into the garden.

“But she is lovely,” protests Pierri. “She is divine. I think I could make love to her very easily. For never have I seen, even in Rome, a figure of such grace and beauty. . . .”

Thus he commits treason against the women of his own land, and knows it not, for Pierri’s sex-hungry brain is unable any more to make sane comparisons in alien and unkind Afghanistan.

The fairy in question shows her obvious distaste with

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Pierri, and he follows me unhappily to the side of the tennis court.

No wonder there is a crowd. For on the court is Amanullah. With him is his brother, fat Inayatullah, with two youths of the Palace. The crowd watches, very awed, as they play the strange imported game.

Amanullah is no good, but is terribly energetic. He has not troubled to change his clothes for the game, but has only taken off coat and waistcoat and collar. The Royal garments, indeed, lie on the side of the court. That is like Amanullah. He suddenly felt like playing tennis. Very well then. He played.

Poor as he is, he is physically far better fitted for any activity than is Inayatullah. The elder brother, we suspect, is there only because the King commands. He looks very unhappy, and is sweating profusely through his shirt and trousers. He holds the racquet clumsily, and every effort he makes to chase the elusive ball is greeted by a gust of laughter from the other side of the net. Amanullah taunts him, cries with glee, and lets the crowd know that he is highly amused at the antics of his elder brother.

A queer scene, this. The Court makes merry before the public. The King plays a childish new game and taunts his brother for his fatness. Habibullah was never like this. The old Amirs of Afghanistan, dignified and majestic, never let their humanity shine through the majesty of the throne. Yet here is the King, three days before the annual *jirga*, playing a game in the public gardens. Strange times, and strange events in the forbidden land.

So we think, as we move on to the café, and take a table overlooking the gardens, on the terrace. It is already fairly well populated. There are half the members of the European population. The Italian

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colonel has come up from Kabul for the day, and joins our table. We order tea.

Over in the corner is Ali Ahmed Jhan, the strong man of Kabul. He is Governor, reputed to be of terrific authority in the whole country, a genial rascal of the old school who has survived the many changes in his capital. He is at the right hand of the King still. He bows to us, and smiles illumine his broad bewhiskered face. He is popular in Kabul still.

A German blonde comes in with her half-white children. She is wife of an Afghan Minister. A Japanese girl, very modern in her clothes, with a Turkish officer. Two Russians from the hotel. Two German engineers. More Italians. The café is filling up.

The daylight is going, swiftly and beautifully, as there is another stir on the steps leading to the café, and Amanullah comes to a reserved table.

He is flushed with his game, but Inayatullah is purple. Amanullah has jacket and waistcoat over his arm, and is still laughing at the antics of his opponent. Just now, he looks less than his thirty-nine years—an adventurous boy when he is at a crisis of a lifetime.

The long low note of the Imam calling from the mosque, comes stealing up to the café. It blends so perfectly with the peace of the evening and the growing dusk. There can be seen a movement of men towards their evening prayer. But the sound is swallowed up in the chatter of the café where the Court takes tea.

The parasites and the flatterers are round the King now. They are talking of the celebrations for Independence Day. I am taken up to the King, and we mutter compliments in French. He is not interested in my presence. He takes it as natural that there should be Englishmen in Kabul. Yet I know that I am the only one unconnected with the Legation. Dusk is nearly

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down over the hills, and the lights are twinkling over the ornamental arch.

But the peak where sits my mullah is still aflame. He will be sitting in the last rays of the sunlight, his head on the ground in prayer to Allah. Perhaps he is full of strange fears, born of what he has seen in the valley below. It will be growing cold on the mountain-top, even while the gold of the setting sun dims. Then the light on the peak is gone, and it is night.

The King goes down from the café. The band packs up and leaves the kiosk. Pierri and I walk down in the dark.

Afghanistan's little hour of Western vanity is over.

CHAPTER X

THE NIGHTMARE PARLIAMENT—FROCK-COATS IN THE WILDS
—A FAMOUS HAT—MODERNISATION BY ORDER

EVEN the dawn, that morning, seemed charged with the omens of what was to come. Certainly there were enough reminders for the ear that this was a day of days. I woke to the shivering blast of trumpets. Not the orderly, prescribed tunes of British bugles, laid down by tradition; these notes, that seemed to come from right under my bedroom window, were wild, excitable, hysterical. In every key and every cadence the rival bands of the Afghan Army were heralding, to whomsoever might hear, the Day of the Celebration of Independence.

The valley of Paghman was swirling in mist. The hills were invisible. Even the violent pink and red of the new cinema could not be seen through the mist. Yet the sun was already strong, and its heat could be felt. But the old heights of the Hindu Kush were loath to part with the coverings of night, and up there beyond the last tree and the last green thing, they must be mysterious, cold, and damp for the hillmen who scorned to venture down below into the pleasant valley.

There were sounds of awakening life in the hotel as well. Next door, the Russian family was employed in the sickening business of getting up. One after the other, it seemed, collected his or her liquid resources before the early morning process of expectoration. One by one they indicated, audibly and shamelessly, that this was morning and the time for satisfying and lengthy yawns.

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There were rattles and high words from the Chinese diplomat with the mysterious wife on the other side. There were bumps and heavings down the passage—from the huge-booted Russian, I guessed. And, faithful to his time-table, there came a knock on the door from the insolent, semi-educated Afghan serving boy, bringing this morning two boiled eggs, a saucer full of salt, a gargantuan pot of milk, sugar—and, though I was beginning to hope wildly that he had remembered everything—no tea. The omission was repaired, however, within three-quarters of an hour—a record for the boy and the hotel. Truly this was a big day in history.

The clamour outside redoubled. The spectators had begun to assemble, and each had endeavoured somehow to add to the noise. There were even more bugles collected from somewhere. The grape-sellers had doubled their stocks for the day. The great piles of fruit on the stalls had grown even bigger. New little stalls had been erected, and were causing private little wars in every corner of the square. The policemen were more dignified, more bullying, more impressive, and more ineffectual than ever. They were standing in little groups in the centre of the square, smoking and chatting, ceasing only now and then from their high political discussions to land out lustily and haphazardly with their staves at the assembled crowds. The effect was good, for they seemed to get even more enjoyment from their cigarettes after one of these affrays.

I locked up my trunks and went downstairs. The Russian in the boots, who seemed to spend his life half-way down the staircase, was at his post. As the days passed, he seemed to be becoming less and less contented as I gave him his morning cigarette. But this morning he smiled.

“Cigarette!” he said, and I contend to this day

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that the new arrangement of his unshaved lips, the showing of yet more blackened teeth, and the sudden air of desperation, betokened that here was a smile. Truly the greatest of days, for he never contorted himself in this manner again.

There were two dozen beggar boys on the doorsteps, instead of the usual dozen. There were two policemen on the front steps. There were a couple of hundred odds and ends parked in the compound. The manager was even more frantic than ever I had seen him even in his apoplectic life. All the serving boys were this morning on the verandah, having given up their work for the day (or for a week if the festivities lasted as long). All the guests, with the exception of myself, were in the *salon*, waiting for breakfast. All the cooks were at the fruit stalls, and all the house-boys were chivvying beggars away from the kitchens. Everything seemed set, in the hub of Afghanistan, for gala.

It was now possible to see the cause of the morning salute to progress and national advance. The promiscuous blowing of bugles, delightful as it is in the young, was now conducted by infants in the guise of soldiers, enjoying their first official apparel. They were happy and care-free. They had risen early, like children before a fancy-dress party, and donned their proud raiment hours before it was necessary. They were thrilled with the same excitement as pervades the nursery before the "Great Day." And it is one of the more sage of nursery dicta that the anticipation is in many cases more delightful than the event. So it was to-day.

In some cases they could not even resist the temptation to play with the insignia of their offices as privates in the Afghan Army. These were slightly more dangerous to the surrounding community than were the bugles to my peace of mind. Their bayonets were rusty and of

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varied patterns. Their rifles were dirty and came from France, Russia, Italy, the country factories of the Khyber, and Persia. Their puttees were rolled on the principle of speed rather than accuracy. In many cases there were illustrations of how dishonest contractors can save for their old age, even in face of the new nationalism, the new patriotism, and the new ideals for Afghanistan imported from eleven capitals of the West.

But they could all blow bugles. Buglers, lorry drivers, artillery men, Air Force cadets, and cavalry men, astride the lean-shanked ponies of the hills, blew bugles. They blew no tune, no note, no call to arms. They blew because this was holiday, and this was excitement. The children's party was in its heyday of anticipation. Never in Kabul had there been a day which, according to report, was going to mean so much to every man of them.

I think they believed in it all. I believe every man there put trust in his own Allah to transform in a day the ranks of the primitive into the cohorts of civilisation. A haphazard history, mainly concerned with the shedding of blood, was to be guided at one stroke into the paths of peace. Allah was great, and so was the name of Amanullah ! Blow, then, your bugles !

Beside me, suddenly, was Signor Pierri.

He wore his best suit. His trousers, sombre black of the boulevards, were creased with an edge not found outside the cities of elegant men. His shoes glinted with a polish never bestowed by the hands and energy of an Afghan serving boy. Frail shoes, ready for the evening stroll down the cool tree-lined roads to the favourite café. His gloved hands rested languidly on a silver-knobbed cane. His tie foamed from the whitest of linen collars, and swept into the curve of his waist.

"I think," said Signor Pierri, talking slowly and

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choosing his words meticulously, "that this is going to be . . . to be . . . *enfin, un jour de gala . . . !*"

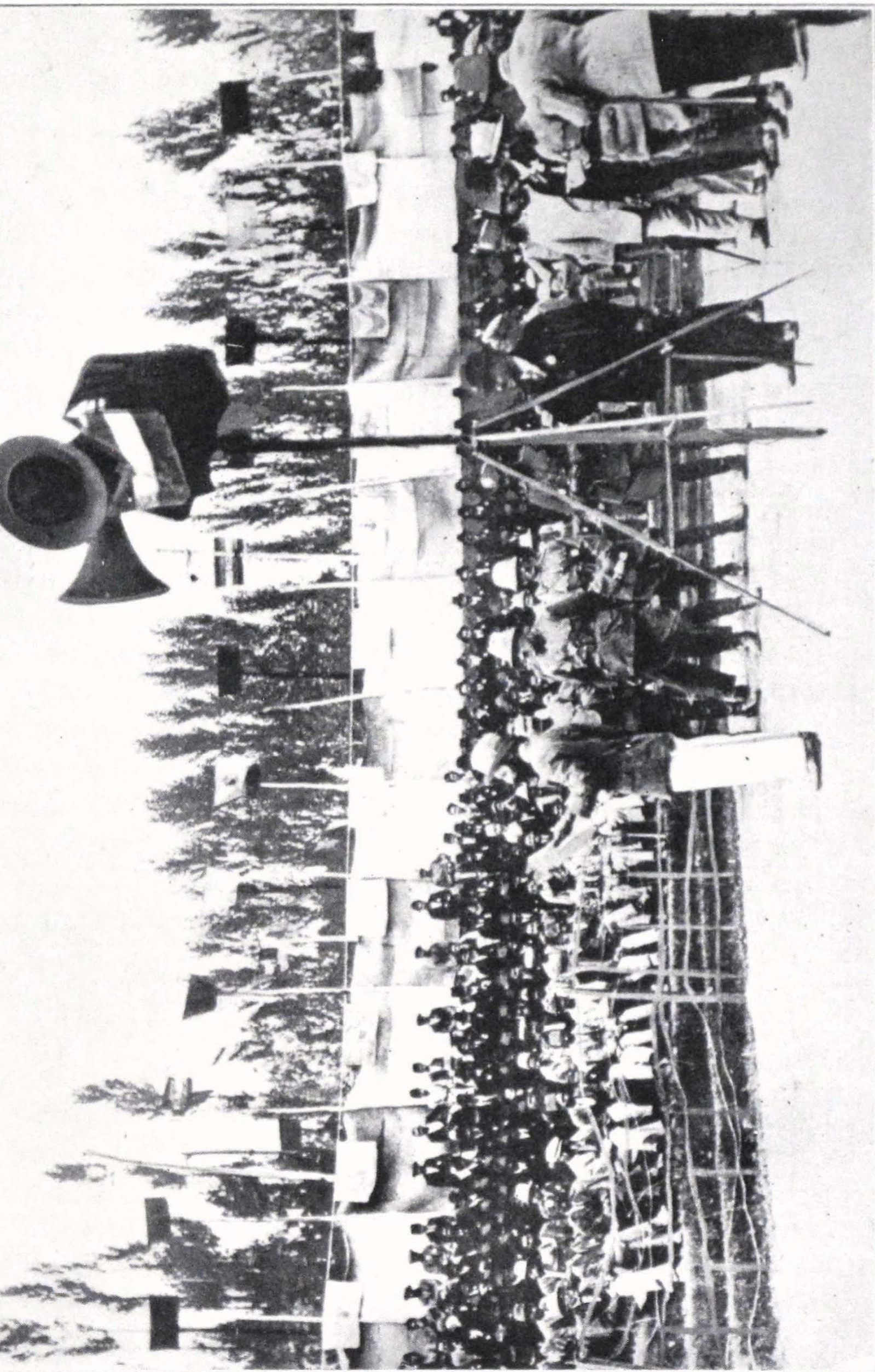
Wonderful Italy, I thought. The poor, lonely drift of civilisation landed in the country of the rifle, without a job, without a penny, without, most urgent of all, a café with a lady or two to romance about. He walked away, up the street, picking his way and dreaming that this was Rome. He never wore a topee, but a wide black hat, with a clip inside to hold the folds together. He was an orchid in the desert.

An officer clattered up the road. They are strange, these Afghans. All the fine uniforms you can think of. Boots that might have come from the Drury Lane Ruritanian chorus. Gauntlets as of old, and glittering epaulettes. Spurs like a film actor's, sword clanking. And all this fine cutlery and men's fancy-wear perched astride a lame old skin with spavin and a limp. Bridles that did not fit, and leathers and irons that had never known polish. They go clattering up the road, with terrific dignity and aplomb, on ponies that would shame the East End coster.

"And why not?" they would reply if you had asked them. "The horse goes, does it not? And costs little to feed? Much less, at any rate, than the Army pays for its upkeep. . . ."

The crowd is dense now and very redolent. There is the smell of humanity mounting right up to the doors of the hotel, mingling there with those strange smells that cling always to that dreary hall. There is the smell of the East, which is said to be glamour, but which is just stale humanity. There is the smell of bodies that have been many days in the sun and the dust. There is the smell of disease.

But the workmen have finished decorating the triumphal arch leading up the avenue to the Palace.



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They have hung garlands round the statue of the Afghan lion which strangles so realistically the lion of Britain. "To the great Afghan victory," says the legend underneath, and there are many here who picture a stand-up fight with the might of Afghanistan conquering the armies of England in open battle.

(The victory was the famous ambush of the Khyber. But it was not complete, for one man out of thousands struggled through the vale of death to tell the tale.)

Here come more police, marching to the gardens. Their duties are many to-day, and only last night I was nearly arrested for failing to be sufficiently European. For I could not read Pushtu, and the notice at the gate was in Pushtu. "Every visitor to the gardens," it meant, "must wear a hat."

I did not wear a hat. I walked in the Eastern style. It was nearly dark, and a topee becomes wearisome. At dusk I discarded my topee before going to the café in the gardens.

And the way of Westernisation is hard. Amanullah had remarked that in Rome, Paris, Berlin, Venice, and London, men wore hats when outdoors. Very well, then, so would the citizens of the new Afghanistan. And here was I, who should know how to behave, bareheaded in the elaborate gardens of the new city of Paghman, Amanullah's Western gift to the East.

That cost two rupees (Afghan ratio).

The crowds were surging up the road now. More troops, their lungs exhausted now, tramped silently up the road. Bugling was over. The children's party had begun.

I found Pierri in the gardens, gazing sadly at a German nursemaid in charge of strange German-Afghan children. The Berlin blonde, wife of the Afghan

Minister, was there too. She lounged on an iron seat, her blue eyes vacant, seeing perhaps the happy life of the city from which she had been transplanted for ever.

Pierri and I sat down on the grass.

“ I think,” said Pierri, “ this is going to be gay.”

It was. The band started suddenly. At least half of the instrumentalists in the toy bandstand knew the notes. They played valiantly, striving to drown the sudden snorts of their companions. There were some blowings where there should have been suckings. There were some shrieks from those tortured brasses where there should have been plaintiveness and sobbings.

Then we got into trouble again.

The policeman was inclined to be pitying. Here were we, two apparent *feringhe*, who did not know that it is not civilised to sit on the grass. Here were we, two representatives of the West, setting a bad example to the East. The policeman was sure that in Western cities, from all he had been told, men in hats did not sit on the grass when there were seats. Why then should we seek to subvert the orders of the King who had been Westernised ?

That much I read from his angry words, and his violent gesticulations towards those unbending, uncompromising iron seats. And, rather sheepishly, we got up and sat bolt upright in those seats. Modernity had won. For when a man has to leave the comfort of fresh green grass, the smell of earth, to sit on an iron park bench, then you may take it that there is an end for ever to the amenities of the untrampled virgin wastes of the world. We were supposed to be in one now.

But Signor Pierri had been in “ the forbidden land ” longer than I. His fine delicate features registered only

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faint surprise as he pulled up his elegant trousers and sat sedately on the park bench in the very shadow of the Hindu Kush.

And from that dignified position we watched, slightly bewildered, as the policemen went their rounds, rousing up the men and women from the grass, prodding them with their staves, and indicating to them with many an appeal to Allah, that they should bend their mighty forms to the harsh outlines of a park bench. For this was the new Afghanistan.

They did so, hesitantly. To many of them, this was the first time that they had encountered the strange, uncomfortable bending of the body in two places in order to sit. Some of them tried to draw their feet up and perch on the seats—an attempt that received the scorn once more of the all-knowing policemen. They rapped them on the knees as a lesson in social etiquette. They forced their feet down to the gravel. They pressed their bodies back sternly against the iron staves.

“Insh’Allah,” they said, and did their best to be modern according to orders.

But it was hard work. For what were their heels, naked save for the strap of their sandals, if not for sitting on? For what were their knees, but to support their arm-pits, leaving their hands and arms free to bargain with? Only thus could a man get face to face, to see his business adversary close to. Only thus could the full effect of an Eastern gesture have its due reward. Only thus could a man watch his friend’s hands to see that there were no suspicious movements towards his sash where dwelt the knife.

But they sat upright, before the menacing staves of new mentors. Somewhere in a garden, somewhere in Hyde Park or Unter den Linden or St. Mark’s Square, Amanullah the Brave had seen men and women sitting

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upright, with their hats on. That was the West. Very well then, they should do it in the new Westernised city of Kabul and in the new garden of Paghman.

The slopes, so comfortable to the long spare frames of the hillmen, were soon bare. The park seats were filled. There seemed to be a Sunday-morning-in-Kensington-Gardens atmosphere. The German-Afghan children played round their prams. The nurses did what nurses do in all gardens in the world. The police paraded. (One of them sat down subconsciously on the grass until he remembered.) And the hills laughed. How the hills laughed !

The band played. There was a crescendo of sound. After a sharp tussle the beginners lost the fight through shortness of breath, and the lilt of a terribly familiar tune began to be discerned. Everything was ready for the party. All the excitement had evaporated as it does at all children's parties.

And into the garden came six men.

(When, a week later, this story appeared under my name on the breakfast tables of half England, and was copied by every newspaper in the world, I was called a liar in every polite phrase invented by the diplomatic services in six countries. It was impossible, and it was incredible. It could not happen, it would not happen, and it did not happen, they said.)

Nevertheless, the six men walked into the garden. They came slowly, and, it seemed, painfully. They held hands. They clutched at each other's shoulders as if for support. But they came, and along the paths too, for the police saw to that.

Here is what I saw.

They were big-boned, loose-limbed men of the Afghan hills. There was no mistaking their pale blue eyes, striking to the foreigner, in that dark skin. But they

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were singular, in that they wore no beards, and the hair at the back of their neck was clipped short.

They wore black homburg hats. They wore black coats. They wore black trousers of the same thick stuff. They wore—this last is the incredible climax—they wore black boots.

As they advanced, it was seen that they had shirts of white showing above their black waistcoats. Some rough hand had noosed their necks with a strand of black, and tied it in the semblance of a knot. Their hands stuck out from beneath the stove-pipe sleeves of their jackets. The heavy boots clumped on the gravel as they made their ungainly way towards us.

There were more behind. They came in a solid mass. The gates were black with men shambling towards us, the black homburg hats bobbing, the arms working mechanically. It was nightmare in the sunshine.

The German blonde was sitting up erect in her park seat. She had the wild look of disbelief in her eyes. The band had stopped playing. The hillmen stood up from their seats. Only the police seemed unmoved.

Behind the dreadful army came a different, glittering band that gave away the secret. There came Amanullah, stepping out of his Rolls, a great German police dog on a leash in his hand. On his head glittered one of the hats of Mr. Scott, Piccadilly. The strong, sturdy form was clothed in a morning coat, grey trousers, yellow gloves, soft collar of white, and a grey tie.

Then we understood. The manufacture of history is seldom recognised at its true value at the hour of the event. But here, if we can trace the mind of a simple man back to its starting-point, was the course of the idea that Amanullah the Brave had carried in his mind from eleven countries and capitals.

A yet more elegant figure accompanied him. Was

this irony? Was this the grimmest joke in Eastern history? Whatever the thoughts behind the mask of his face, Sir Francis Humphrys, British Minister in Kabul, wore his Ascot clothes. . . .

Beneath the very brow of the Pamirs there gleamed a grey top-hat. It was a top-hat of great price and careful selection. It was a top-hat chosen one sunny morning in Piccadilly, when all the world was choosing Ascot clothes and Ascot hats. It was fitted with the same unctuousness and solicitude as accompanies the fitting of ordinary hats. It was eased a little on a heater, the way ordinary hats are eased. And then it was delivered in the familiar van with the prize-winning cobs, driven by the silk-hatted coachman. That hat made history on its last eventful display in the "forbidden country." It was never worn again.

Sir Francis wore a grey morning coat and grey trousers. His stock shamed the brutality of the surrounding hills by its gentility. His patent-leather boots trod the ends of the earth that day as if they were pacing the lawns of the Royal enclosure.

Afghanistan was to be modernised. New ideals, new ambitions, new culture would inspire Amanullah's beloved land. He had already decided that there should be a Parliament, and that, nominally at any rate, the chosen delegates of his people should have something to say in the ruling of their unworthy selves.

The Parliament should have dignity and prestige. It would command the respect of the populace. It would be expensive, but it would be a proud boast in the countries of civilisation to read of the "Afghan Parliament."

So Amanullah looked at the Parliaments of Europe. He saw staid and soberly dressed men passing silently into great houses of talk. From these houses there

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emanated edicts and orders, which, miraculously, were eventually translated into law.

Yet they seemed to have a dignity impossible to imagine among his own countrymen. They seemed to rule unconsciously. And then the brain of the child in him stumbled across a half-truth that strikes all children and many animals. The secret was in the clothes.

He had found it. You cannot rule by law and order, by precept and principle, if you dress in the style of the jungle and the hills. You can attain dignity by the pulling on of a pair of trousers. You can tie up your impressiveness every morning as you lace up your boots.

They had it at Westminster, they had it in Rome. In Moscow they wore the garments of peace and orderliness, even in a land of war. Who could imagine, at Versailles, the men of mighty Parliaments debating in the clothing of the jungle?

The answer was easy. Afghanistan was to be civilised. By Allah it should begin right! Its first Parliament should be clothed in the manner of the great Parliaments of the West.

And that thought had beaten into the brain of Amanullah as he risked his neck at the wheel of his car all the way back through his wild, primitive land.

“Send me all the tailors in Kabul!” he commanded, the day after he arrived. “Send the bootmakers too, and the sellers of skins and the merchants of the cloth market! Send the barbers and the barbers’ assistants. Send me the police!”

So on the day of the first Afghan Parliament, the delegates came over the hills into Kabul City.

“The Amir is back!” they greeted each other. “The Amir is back, and the travellers say that he has been over the Black Water to see the *feringhe* in his own land.”

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“That is so. The Amir is back. And the merchants in the city say that he has brought some strange theories, some strange proposals, and some strange machines, inventions of the white devils, to make life for us a little more difficult.”

“Ah well. Perhaps these are tales of the bazaar. The merchants are liars always. We shall know, and Allah will protect us.”

So the hillman came to Kabul. Allah, if he heard the pleas for protection, did not withstand the police and the soldiery.

“Are you a delegate? Then come into the Palace!”

He was inside a huge barrack-room. He was taken and stripped. He was held while the barbers sheared his long locks.

“But this is against the Koran!” he protested. “Wherein it is written that a true Believer must be bearded, like Mahomed!”

“Maybe,” said the police, “but it is the order of the Amir.”

His clothes were flung into a corner. “Put your skinny shanks through these!” said the ribald policeman.

“And here,” said another policeman, “put this on your fat head!”

“But this,” protested the delegate, “this is sacrilege! The Koran says also that the Believer must be turbaned! Besides, where shall a man rest his head when he is weary? There are no folds in this vile head-dress for a man to wrap over his mouth on a dusty day. There is no cover for the face if he meet an enemy! There is not even a yard of it with which to strangle a foe without a cry!”

But the policeman clapped onto his head the homburg hat, and laughed at his religion in the new Afghanistan.

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“ Keep that for the mullahs ! ” he taunted, and sent the delegate reeling from a blow on the back—to be caught by the next policeman serving out thick black boots in place of the loose, cool, and sloppy “ chapplas ” of the Afghan.

So was modernised the Afghan M.P. in the first modern Parliament. It was so easy. The police mincing-machine turned him out the other end with the veritable look of the West—from a distance. It was a pity that the last score or so had to take whatever clothes were left, without regard to size. There were some boots left over which would only go on with a certain degree of force. There were some hats that perched precariously on the top of shaven heads. There were some that threatened to extinguish the features of an M.P. even when he was on the point of catching the Speaker’s eye.

But—Insh’Allah, there it was. Allah might be displeased at the defiance of the Koran, but the Amir’s displeasure was a danger even closer. And, in any case, they were only hillmen, uneducated and too stupid for the new civic life of Kabul.

Besides, there were some contented little groups in Kabul Bazaar that night. They were composed of the tailors, the barbers, the bootmakers, the cloth merchants, and the police. For of what use was modernisation if the fruits did not go to some of those who had saved a little on a Government contract, bribed a little advantage here and there, and skimmed an inch or two on every coat, every hat, every pair of parliamentary trousers, and every pair of heavy, clumping, “ Westernised ” boots ?

That nightmare procession in the fair garden of Paghman was destined to cost a king his throne. The snip of those scissors round the chins of the faithful



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was the first clash of steel in a war which sent a strong man scuttling like a rabbit down to safety ; that sent airplanes zooming over the impregnable hills every day for a month, carrying back refugees from a land gone religiously crazy ; the snip of those scissors echoed round the hills ; it brought back crucifixion in Kabul, and the shooting of the live bodies of men from the mouths of cannon ; it caused men to be boiled in oil once more ; it caused the men of the hills to sharpen their knives and creep down upon the rich granaries ; a palace shot up to the sky in flames ; the silks and satins of Regent Street and the frocks and fancies of the Rue de la Paix fed the flames ; it set the wireless crackling over all the world with the decisions of the consulates ; it began the greatest “as you were” order in the East.

Signor Pierri and I watched from our park benches.

“I was aware, you will remember,” said Signor Pierri, readjusting his tie, “that this was to be a gala. . . .”

CHAPTER XI

THE KING SPEAKS—A THREAT—A MILITARY AFFAIR—THE
FIRST AFGHAN DRAMA—I AM TURNED OUT

THE bandsmen, wonderfully caparisoned to-day, had exhausted themselves many times in playing the National Anthem. There was a pause, as they wiped beaded brows with the pipe-clayed cuffs of their jackets. Amanullah moved slowly up the gardens, accompanied by his Queen, now only half veiled, but beautiful and natural in her glittering, enfolding garments. Behind Amanullah came the little procession of foreign delegates.

Every member of the British Legation wore a top-hat. Sober and respectable, the representatives of British Sundays and diplomatic occasions moved after the Royal party with due dignity. They wore morning coats and spats. Victorian England was flourishing in the outposts of civilisation.

Stark, the Russian delegate, ignored such compliments, even in the presence of Royalty. More probably he had never worn a top-hat. He and his wife moved self-consciously in the mixed gathering. Following them came the representatives of France, Italy, Japan, China, Germany, and Belgium. But never another silk hat. . . .

The *sowars* of the Indian Cavalry clattered up the road after providing the Guard of Honour to Amanullah. The members of his own bodyguard, even more like a musical comedy chorus to-day, arranged themselves round the King. They flung their cloaks elegantly

over their shoulders, displayed their silver epaulettes, and clanked their swords along the gravel paths of the gardens. Their glorious career had reached its climax. Pierri and I were still speechless.

The meeting of the first Parliament had been arranged in a corner of the gardens. It was a natural arena, provided with chairs and long wooden seats, and was gaily beflagged.

There were microphones already in position, in charge of an Indian electrician who had brought them from Delhi. Towards this arena the black-suited delegates were shepherded by the police.

Pierri and I went along with them. They were still self-conscious and half-afraid. The boots were beginning to pinch. The black knots round their throats were already untidy and tended to escape from their waistcoats. They felt, above all, ridiculous and naked without their beards.

They were ushered into their places. Before them, keeping them from the arena, were double strands of barbed wire. No risks could be taken with the first delegates of His Majesty's first modern Parliament. Once in the arena, they might slide back to their old habits. They might even sit on the green grass. Such conduct would rob the first Parliament of its dignity.

They were led to the long rows of benches and induced to sit on them. They did so, and when I approached in front of the barbed wire and took their photographs, they were too sheepish to object. The police, at the side of the black phalanx of modernised M.P.'s, saw to it that they did not break their ranks or wreck the dignity of the meeting.

On another side were the principal delegates. The grey topper of Sir Francis Humphrys stood out in the

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sunshine. The black silk hats of his juniors surrounded him with Western dignity. They sat in a little wedge, without a smile on their faces, in front of the uniform *purdahs* that marked the place of the women of Amanullah's Court.

Other delegates and their wives made up another small portion of the audience. And the crowd, swelled that day by thousands from Kabul and the shops of the suburbs, milled and struggled on the outskirts of the arena for another glance at that truly astonishing company of delegates. I struggled through to the circle and pretended to be an expert photographer.

Then, without further ceremony, there began the business of the first "modern" Afghan Parliament ever held in the country. It was also destined to be the last.

Amanullah strode to the centre of the arena. Asking advice from the engineer in charge of the loud speakers, he shifted his feet till he was in the exact position. The band started yet another burst of the National Anthem, but were silenced after the first few bars. And Amanullah spoke.

His voice was hard and strong. It carried to the limits of that crowd of five hundred or so people gathered in and round the arena. It carried over their heads into the gardens, and there may have been a dull echo of it for my mullah, to whom my thoughts would always turn as the sole real person I knew in the new Afghanistan. He was probably sitting on his peak above the valley, silent and deep in thought.

Amanullah's voice was charged with vigour and enthusiasm. It was a thrilling voice, the voice of a conqueror and a brave man. It thrilled every man who heard it. It caused little ripples of excitement to pass over that strange company.

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I had it translated afterwards. He told of his trip to the West. He told them of his triumphs and his honours.

“Your King,” he said, “has been the recipient of every honour that the Western nations can bestow on him. He has seen the military might of Italy, France, England, and Russia. He has dined with kings and rulers, and every nation has vied with the other in doing him honour. He has taken their homage as a tribute to the new Afghanistan stirring in the East.

“On every hand good wishes and compliments have been offered for the future of the new régime. The world is watching us, and it behoves you, as members of a great and martial and progressive race, to justify the hopes that are entertained for your future. We meet this day to celebrate the glorious victory which gained for my country its Independence and its liberty.

“In celebration, I have summoned the first free Afghan Parliament. It is formed of your own representatives, who will direct your own path towards victory and greater liberty. You see before you the representatives of every State in my country. They are gathered here to voice the wishes of the people, and to lead you rapidly out of the mists of ignorance which have clouded my beloved land for so many centuries. . . .”

The black-coated delegates listened shyly. They understood only a part of what their ruler was saying, for they were still petrified by their importance, and in any case, between them they were accustomed to a score of dialects. They had travelled many miles for this. They had been casually selected from their native villages, some because they had business to do in Kabul, some because they were natural leaders, some because they were the only ones to be spared from the work of their hills and valleys. They shifted uneasily now under

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the glare of five hundred people. Nobody smiled. Nobody saw the rich, fantastic humour of this gathering under the brilliant sky. The eager voice went on.

“In the last few years,” boomed the loud speakers, “you have seen your glorious country gradually lifting itself from the pit of ignorance. You have seen improvements in every department of State. You have seen new buildings grow out of the Afghan plain, and new roads wind their way over the hills for the transport of the strangers who will come to your country for its further improvement. Trade has increased, and your Customs departments are reaping the benefit. The Army is becoming modern and progressively efficient. Your children are being educated, and your freedom is being established. You are to benefit from your association with the West. You are to take your place among the great nations of the world, on equality with all men. . . .”

Amanullah, excited now and on fire with his own enthusiasm, swept the gathering with his eyes. He saw the attentiveness of the foreign delegates. He saw the quiet interest of his friend the British Minister. He saw the women of the *purdah*, glancing at him through the network of their cloaks, listening to the words that hinted at their freedom in the years to come. Amanullah did not yet dare to express his wishes on that point. It was too early yet to tell of the decision he had made to defy the oldest belief in their religion—that one day he would rid their women of the curse of the *purdah* system.

But they sensed it. Already the news had come, appropriately enlarged, that the Queen had appeared in Europe with her face naked to the gaze of the common people. Already it had come to their ears that she had driven in the public streets with her face unveiled. Her photograph had been taken, even. All the

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world had gazed at her features. She had rid herself of the *purdah* clothes, shown the hidden beauty of her eyes unashamedly to the public, and travelled among a foreign people with her beauty uncovered.

The story was not altogether believed. Indeed, it was incredible. Such things could not be, even under the ruling of Amanullah. The travellers were lying again. And there was surely enough cause for worry in Afghanistan these days without this new threat to religion and national precedent.

The hint in his speech, however, did not go entirely unnoticed. Sir Francis Humphrys noted it. Stark, the Russian, noted it. The more intimate of his ministerial friends noted it. Perhaps for the first time a stir of apprehension passed over the first Parliament.

But Amanullah passed on. With fine inspiring voice and words, he tried to lift the delegates out of their unhappy ignorance. His words were calculated to inspire. They succeeded in creating an atmosphere of wonder—and not a little fear. He finished the speech, and the meeting sat silent save for the polite and restrained applause of the foreign delegates. The band, tactful this time, crashed out with the bars of the National Anthem.

So far as I know, there were no more speeches in that first and last Parliament. The populace was too stunned still for speech-making. No man, clapped into trousers and a hat for the first time in his life, would feel in the mood for oratory. No man, wrenched from his village in the hills, shaved against the orders of the Koran, his feet laced into tight boots, would feel at his ease for eloquence. “Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking and to boots . . .” he might begin, with truth. But humour was not then in the heart of the Afghan Member of Parliament. His soul was sick and filled with a great

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fear. The sombre ranks sat stolid behind the barbed wire.

Amanullah and the principal delegates moved away. Pierri and I followed. The delegates were left to themselves. We saw them later on in twos and threes, walking disconsolately about the gardens, the butt of every Kabuli and hillman. Their clothes grew more untidy as the day progressed. Many of them unlaced their boots, and would have taken them off if it had not been for the vigilance of the police. Their ties became more string-like and confused. Their hats perched at every strange angle on their shaved heads. There was to be no more politics that day.

Lighter entertainment was next offered. It was rumoured that there was to be a military display after lunch, on the new parade ground. The cars were drawing up already, and the delegates were hurrying off to be there for the most favoured places. Pierri and I made our way to the hotel and drank lemonade, trying to assure ourselves that what we had seen had actually happened.

Ram Prasad was no good to me to-day. Even he could not find me a seat in the smallest of the King's Rolls. Pierri and I hired a motor bus, and rattled down the road toward the new parade ground for the afternoon's entertainment.

Yes, this was a great day. The shopkeepers would have voted for an Independence Day every week. The stalls were besieged by the crowds, buying armfuls of fruit. The dust rose high, and the beggars, all of them come from Kabul City for the day, lined the road and whined their supplications to the passers-by.

A grand chorus of motor horns added to the hubbub. Every old lorry in Kabul had come to Paghman, bringing its packed loads of cheerful and excited citizens.

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Most of them were kept outside the gardens. They did not possess the qualifications of European clothes for entry within the gates.

The police were having high holiday. A dozen arguments, accompanied by the persuasion of their staves for emphasis, were taking place in the confines of the square. The troops elbowed their way through. Even the perpetual moroseness of Pierri was lifted from his shoulders for the moment.

Our bus clattered its way down the hill. We were covered in dust, and many times escaped by a miracle from the murder of an inoffensive group of citizens. Eventually we arrived at the parade ground. The band was once more playing the National Anthem.

Seated on a special platform, Amanullah and the privileged group of foreign delegates were watching the first of the military events. This was a contest of marksmanship, and the King watched through his field glasses with a close interest as the results were put up on an indication board.

They were good, these crack shots from the Army. Even the Turkish officers who competed could not beat them. They were using Italian rifles, and after the uncertainty of the home-made products they were scoring consistently and well. Amanullah was delighted. I could hear him explaining to Sir Francis and to Stark, his neighbours, as the results came up on the board.

His other diversion was his cine-camera, which he had brought back as one of the prizes of his European visit. He stood up in his place and swung it often round the assembled company. The King was pleased to be the film-man from his throne. He was the boy again, revelling in the sports that had always been his favourites.

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He was delighted when I went in front of the platform and took photographs of him. He urged Sir Francis and Stark to look at the camera. He indicated that I should photograph the ladies, Souriya among them. He was chattering like a small boy.

There were foot-races and bayonet-fighting contests. The flower of the Afghan Army was showing off. There was a display of arms drill under the command of a Turkish officer, and we could see how well the troops had responded, after much pain and tribulation, in the simpler movements of mass drill. Amanullah was explaining his military toy to his friends. It was probably the happiest day of his life.

I found the Russian journalist there too. Talking to him, I wondered whether he had sensed the interest that the whole world would take in this day ; whether he had understood the significance of the King's speech ; whether he had recognised the drama of that first Parliament, and the story behind Amanullah's precipitate and absurd order insisting on European clothes.

He had not. Talking about it, I realised that he would send nothing from Kabul to the world about the events that day. He had the use of the wireless to Moscow, and, if he chose, London news editors would have the whole story that night. News like that would flash round the world in a day. He had me beaten by forty-eight hours if he wished.

I had no chance of using wireless. There was no opportunity even of using the telegraph line to India, for this was Legation property, and I was not in favour in British official eyes. There was no public telephone line leading out of the country. It seemed that the only way out for the news was to take it myself by that road which needed two days and nights before communication with England could be reached.

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But the Russian was following his Government's policy. For some reason, it was not thought advisable that Amanullah's crazy reforms should be heard by unsympathetic ears or read by eyes which might see the humour of the fantastic situation. I had the news to myself, when four days later that story went to London from a telegraph office no less than seven hundred miles further south.

I left the Russian still more convinced that there was little of interest in the day for European consumption. He did not know that I was already drafting in my head the first story that would reach England of Amanullah's determined step towards disaster. I had already decided to predict his downfall and ignominious failure. For uppermost in my mind was the thought of that lonely mullah on the peak overlooking the valley of fantasy.

Pierri and I made our way back to Paghman and the hotel.

"What next?" he asked. "What further diversion can the new Government offer for our entertainment?"

It was then that I learnt the thrilling news that, in addition to novel constitutions and military displays, there would be lit in Afghanistan that night the flame of the drama. The capital was to have its first European play.

Into the hotel there came a small and weary company of mummerys. They filed disconsolately from a dusty motor lorry that had stopped at the porch. There were four men and three women. They wore the unhappy look of artistes on tour, and did they but know it, they had surely arrived at the rock bottom of the actor's descent into oblivion.

But they were to make history. They were to be responsible for the first theatrical performance ever given

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in the country. The grease paint was coming to the wilds.

Here was another of Amanullah's picturesque schemes. Somewhere—it may have been at Drury Lane, or at the Scala, Milan—the thought struck him that the drama was the final revelation of modernisation and civilisation. Afghanistan must have the theatre! And with characteristic directness, he had commanded the presence of a touring company then playing in Peshawar.

His officials had made all the arrangements. It is true that the players had been promised transport in private cars, and had made the uncomfortable journey in a lorry. It is true that they eventually received only half the salary promised. But that was not the fault of Amanullah. On the Day of Independence, the performance was gone through on the stage of the new cinema, and Amanullah and the principal guests sat in the front row and thrilled suitably.

The little company was pathetic and despondent. It consisted of the owner, a German Jew, and his wife, a South African Dutch. Their son and daughter, one born in Paris and the other in South America, were in the cast. There was a husband of the daughter, himself a New Yorker, and an additional property man who was distinctly Italian. A true Cockney girl, with the cheekiness and adaptability of her kind, completed the cast. Appropriately, it seemed, the international atmosphere of the new Afghanistan was being maintained.

But the eyes of the Cockney girl were dimmed with tears of self-pity when she arrived at the Paghman hotel. Even the progressive friendliness of Pierri, and his humble present of a bunch of grapes, did not brighten her woe-begone features. She feared for her life; she feared for her safety. The comedienne of the show was miserable.

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The owner of the little company described to me the trials and tribulations of their journey. They had, of course, been victims of the grasping officials who had been appointed to see to their safe passage. Hence the lorry instead of the private cars, and the various difficulties at every Customs post and passport examination. The curtain seemed to be doomed to rise on tragedy.

It did.

An hour before the advertised start, the property trunks arrived. The gallant little company fought their way through a gay and struggling crowd to the front door of the theatre, and were conducted to the dressing-rooms. The crowd followed them, and surged round the windows and the doors.

The rumour had gone round Paghman. It was said that the immoral theatre of the West was coming to town. Women would posture and pose in view of the public. They would wear comic clothes, sing before the people, unveiled and unashamed, and enact in the Western way the dramas that could be seen in the brothels and lower cafés of Kabul. The crowd, quickened by excitement, struggled with the police and burst through their ranks to over-fill the cinema long before the curtain was due to rise.

The dressing-room windows were open to the public gaze. The artistes protested to the police to remove the gaping soldiery. The girls were ready to change. They held their comedy clothes in one hand and waved away the jeering troops with the other. Nobody stirred.

Then came the police. The police moved away the soldiers with blows of their staves. Then the girls tried to wave away the police, who had secured for themselves the best positions. Paghman had gone crazy.

Amanullah arrived, and the show began, with the girls

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acting in their travelling clothes. It was a pathetic little variety show, interspersed by the howls of the mob outside.

But Amanullah was pleased. He sat in the front row with the leading Foreign Ministers, and his own Court circle, and congratulated himself on his idea. Here, in a real theatre, was the drama. His country was already civilised. He could boast about the play, and about his own ingenuity in importing a real Western cast. He beamed on the dispirited efforts of the performers. He clapped in the Western manner.

The little Cockney girl had at last played before a real King. But nevertheless the tears streamed down her face, for she had acted in her travelling clothes. Lesser tragedies have reduced the stars of the theatre to loud and lengthy tempests of weeping.

That, so far as I know, was the only performance of the imported theatre in Afghanistan. The curtain came down on an epoch. The crowds surged out slightly disappointed but nevertheless pleased at taking part in the making of history.

Pierri and I had supper with the cast after the show, and listened with awe while the stalwart female leader of the company explained in a loud voice what she would do to a certain Afghan Minister. She was terrific in her wrath. She clenched fists and swore wonderful oaths in German, French, English, and Hindustani. She explained her wrath in Dutch to her husband and detailed it in Cockney to her daughter. The words poured out uninterrupted. Pierri seemed entranced by the stream.

But her threats came to nothing. The German Jew collected the property that night, and booked a lorry for the next morning. Before Paghman had woken up, the actors in the first and last drama to be witnessed in Afghanistan, had left for ever.

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May they never again play their parts on the brink of a volcano.

That same night I saw Sir Francis Humphrys. He was in the hotel, no doubt for the first time, and was sitting in the lounge with two of his staff. He also seemed slightly bemused. Through his brain there raced the incidents of that day, and we exchanged sympathetic remarks as we wondered whether all this could really have happened.

We had seen comedy and a little tragedy. We had seen the blind faith of a man in his own powers. We had seen the stupefaction of his subjects. We had seen, most clearly of all, the results of a vanity that broke down every barrier.

We exchanged nothing but conventional words of politeness about the day. I knew I was watched in Kabul wherever I went. I knew that grave suspicion centred on everyone who was inquisitive. I knew that it was unsafe for me to write in Kabul. Not even to Pierri had I revealed my thoughts on the last few days. I was still the awed and somewhat bewildered observer.

Sir Francis knew that. Without giving any indication of his feelings, he suggested that I was returning to India very shortly. I agreed. He reminded me that I had no connection with the British Legation. I agreed. In the event of trouble, he hinted, the Legation could take no responsibility. I knew that. It was evidently important, apart from the news to be cabled to London, that I must leave Kabul as soon as possible.

The hotel was a seething mass of humanity. The Afghan boys were enjoying themselves terrifically. Everyone was talking of the day's events. Everyone was joking and laughing. Everyone spoke of the future with a little doubt and a careful look round to see that no ears listened to their ribaldries.

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Pierri and I watched the night sky fade, and tried to picture the events in their logical order. It was nightmare. It was pure fantasy. It was a queer opium dream of incredible figures, black and white, new and old. All under the fair sky and in the brilliant sun.

It was dark now, and the lights had come up. There were hundreds of fairy lights in the trees, and even the cinema looked fair-like and beautiful, its shape hidden, its garish colours hidden too. The trees held coloured lamps, and the triumphal arch leading to the Palace was illumined in electric splendour.

The people still walked the road and paraded the square in front of the hotel. The chatter still ascended to the heavens. The motor buses still kept up their chorus as they tried to make their way through the mob. There were a few fights in lively progress. The police were bullying and arguing as usual. And suddenly there was the scream of a well-known claxon horn, and up the road there crept a long black car, its headlights shaming the glow of the lamps.

On the front of the radiator was the illuminated crown. I knew that at the wheel was Ram Prasad in his magnificent white breeches, the tassel of his shako waving in the night wind.

The King was going home. Independence Day was over. Perhaps then, as he passed the Mosque, he recalled his words of nearly two years ago, when he had forecasted this day.

“Afghanistan has bidden adieu for ever to its stationary position . . . we shall introduce to our country such Continental customs as we may think necessary. . . .”

Well, they had been necessary. Here was the end of a day that had brought to his country a Parliament, the

first steps of the drama, a military gymkhana, the clothes of the Continent. He could boast of this day. He could sleep contented with his progress.

The car passed on. I recalled the idea that had already framed itself in my head, and which was high treason. Nobody else except, perhaps, Sir Francis Humphrys, silent in the other corner of the hotel lounge, had imagined it. Yet it persisted the more strongly as I watched that strange assembly.

The idea was merely that this was the beginning of the end. That vanity had gone too far. And going at last to bed, I thought once more of that changeless old mullah on the mountain-top, cold now and sleeping over the valley of disturbance.

There had seemed an odd confidence in his face; almost a look that said that he and his religion could wait for the downfall of wickedness, vanity, modernity . . . and civilisation.

“Good night,” said Pierri, and took himself off to a lonely and fretful bed, dreaming of Roman nights under the same moon.



CHAPTER XII

DOWN TO THE KHYBER PASS—THE TIDE BREAKS—AMANULLAH
TAKES ACTION—REVOLT IN THE PLAINS—HUMILIATION

IF it was difficult to obtain permission to visit Kabul, it was almost impossible to leave. There were more formalities and red tape. My passport was once more decorated with the hieroglyphics of Eastern officials. Once more the official stamp of the British Legation pounded down on the pink sheet, neighbour to that one which said: "Refused permission to cross the Frontier into Afghanistan."

I was to find, also, that I did not yet know the niceties of conduct with officials. For, foolishly, I applied formally at the Afghan department the next morning for the precious seal which should give me leave to pass through the gates of Kabul and down the road to India.

The big office was shut. Only one aged guardian of its secrets slept in the porch. The office, he said through an interpreter, was closed until the end of celebrations. No business could be done.

My guide, an Indian who was in close touch with the officials, suggested a call on the private residence of an official. We walked up the road to his imposing villa. The official, said the servants, was still abed, and could not be bothered with visitors.

A rupee put that right. The dignitary was sent for.

We waited an hour. Then the official came in, still sleepy and unwilling to put pen to paper during this week of leisure. I explained my business.

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No, said he, impatiently. No passports could be signed or visa-ed during this week of celebration. It was against the law.

In any case, he was having a much-needed holiday. His official stamps were at the office, he could not inspect my passport except at the office, and he was not going to bother to open the office for my benefit. I must come again in a week.

Almost desperate, I went away. My Indian adviser listened with awe and solemnity. Then : "Perhaps," he said, "you did not persuade him properly. . . ." I went in again, giving another rupee to the servant. The same official came in once more, still sleepy and somewhat aggrieved. Perhaps, I said, the office would accommodate itself if I gave a small sum of money for the upkeep of its admirable work, expenses of which must be heavy. . . . The note passed. My passport was signed, there and then, with a pencil. But it was the first time I had bribed a senior official of any nation.

There was a further difficulty about transport. The driver who had brought me up had given his address, and had expressed his willingness to take me back to Peshawar any day I wished. We went to the *serai* where he was known.

This time, they had never heard of the man. Though I had seen him greeted there with the enthusiasm due to an old friend, this time they could not recall him, nor his car, nor his coming. Even five rupees did not help memory. They were sorry. They were unacquainted with the driver.

Nor could they suggest another driver. There were no cars in Kabul willing to undertake the journey. I would have to wait till after the great week of celebration. What was a week ?

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On the other hand, there was an opportunity of buying a car for the trip. A good car, cheap. I could buy the driver as well. The price was only a trifle of a thousand rupees. Would not I do that ? I would not.

We combed Kabul *serais* for driver and car. We begged and implored and offered fortunes for a car. Not till after the week. I seemed stuck, with news ready in my head for the telegraph wires, unable to send it off.

At the end of our search, we found a driver. He would start the next morning at four o'clock. He would try to reach Peshawar by the evening. He would call for me at the Kabul Hotel, where I had moved again, before dawn.

Packed, and with water-sack and food ready, I waited at the porch as the dawn broke. Waited till the sun came. Waited till the Italians came down to breakfast, laughing, and repeating again that word of many meanings :

“ So you are going to Peshawar to-night ! Insh'-Allah. . . . ”

I went down to the *serai* where we had found the driver. There was no sign of him, no sign of the car, no knowledge of him, even from those who I knew to be his friends. He had merely decided not to go to Peshawar after all. That was the end of that.

Once more we made the tour of the *serais*. At last, found another driver. He would call for me at dawn. We would get to Peshawar in the day. This time, I said : “ Insh'Allah.”

But he was there. Wrapped up against the early cold, sleepy and half-drugged with the *bhang* he had taken overnight, he salaamed morosely in the half-light. He had petrol and oil and water. He had a spare tyre. Everything was ready.

We were off, before the sun had come to light the

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valley and before the dawn voice of the Iman had cried from the Mosque. Kabul was busy already, though, with shivering, cloaked figures, moving hurriedly about their business, driving cattle and horses out through the great stone gates.

We were quick through the Customs barrier at the bridge. They were too sleepy and bored to bother this morning. We climbed up the hill in the full light of dawn, and I turned back once to see the old city.

The morning mist lay heavy over the roof-tops. Smoke rose lazily from a thousand open fires in the *serais*. The day-long clatter and hum of the bazaar was beginning. From the parade ground there came the long note of a bugle, and already the rifle ranges were cracking with the chatter of machine-guns. It was still bitterly cold, as we turned the next loop in the climbing road. I had seen the last of Kabul, so soon to be enveloped, not with the smoke of dung fires, but with a cloud of more pungent and menacing nature.

That driver could certainly handle a car. He pressed the old vehicle valiantly on, rattled it over the worst bits of the road, swung round hairpin bends, forced it crazily down the slopes. A hundred times we edged the loose stones off the road and down the precipice. We shaved the inside corners on a hundred turns, skidded and slid, swerved on a mad career to old tumble-down bridges, and ran into warmth.

The Frontier gate at Landi Khana, mouth of the Khyber Pass, shut at sundown. It was just possible, however, to do the trip in a day providing that we had no accidents, and no arguments with the Customs gentry. With the employment of a little *bakshish* and not a little tact, I reckoned that we could get to Peshawar that night. Already, before we had run a couple of hours, I was visualising the comfort of the hotel in Peshawar,

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a cool bath and clean clothes, a long drink under the punkahs in the Club.

We stopped once on the way for a cool green melon and a drink, then on again, bumping over the tracks, on towards the Khyber. In my mind was already formed every word of the message I would send predicting the fall of a King and the wreckage of an ideal. The more I thought of it, the more I realised how inevitable it was. Amanullah was doomed.

Jallalabad. We stopped for no more than a refill of petrol and water. We ran through the Customs post, distributing rupees to all and sundry. The Customs gentry were that day in amiable mood. We were well up to time, and the sun still high in the sky. I worked out our speed roughly. We would just do it.

A few miles from Dacca, the engine gasped and spluttered to silence. The feed to the autovac was blocked, and with a full tank, it was nevertheless hopeless to try and find the trouble and remedy it. There were only twenty miles to go, and an hour and a half to do it in, on a road that improved now as we slipped down the hill into the great Dacca Plain. Taking charge from the dispirited driver, who now blamed Allah for his troubles, I filled the autovac from the spare can of petrol, and urged him to save petrol as well as he could, while I would fill up from the can whenever necessary. We ran five miles and filled up again.

After a little persuasion, the driver co-operated admirably in our joint second-splitting efforts at refilling the autovac. Eventually he got the hang of a system by which we did not get in each other's way every quarter of an hour when the engine starved. We would leap down, he would undo the top cap, and I would pour the petrol. Then the can was empty, the rear tank tap impossible to budge, and the precious

petrol impossible to reach with the old and rusted tools in his tool-box. I seized the heaviest tyre-lifter and bashed a hole in the tank, letting the petrol run out half on to the road and half into the spare can. By this method I managed to refill the can, and the rest of the petrol ran off. Two gallons, however, should take us to the first British station in the Khyber Pass.

On we went, and found that according to instructions the Dacca officials had duly telephoned down to their Frontier outpost, telling them to let us through without inspection and delay. We waved to them, and the sentry presented arms, letting us through. Just after that, we ran out of petrol again, and did an extra rapid fill-up from the spare. Ahead was the last Afghan sentry, outside the Government Telegraph Office, and a hundred yards beyond, the gate of the Frontier. And the sun was still lingering behind the nearby hills.

The gate lifted and we were through. The Indian sentry saluted, and we sighed in relief. That cool bath, that long drink in the Peshawar Club, seemed very close.

The *babu* in charge of the British Frontier post came out, looked at our passports, and retired into his office. Another *babu* appeared. Then came the shattering blow, the incredible anti-climax. We were to go back.

"Sir," said the *babu*, choosing his words and revelling in his authority. "Sir, it is too late. It is after six o'clock."

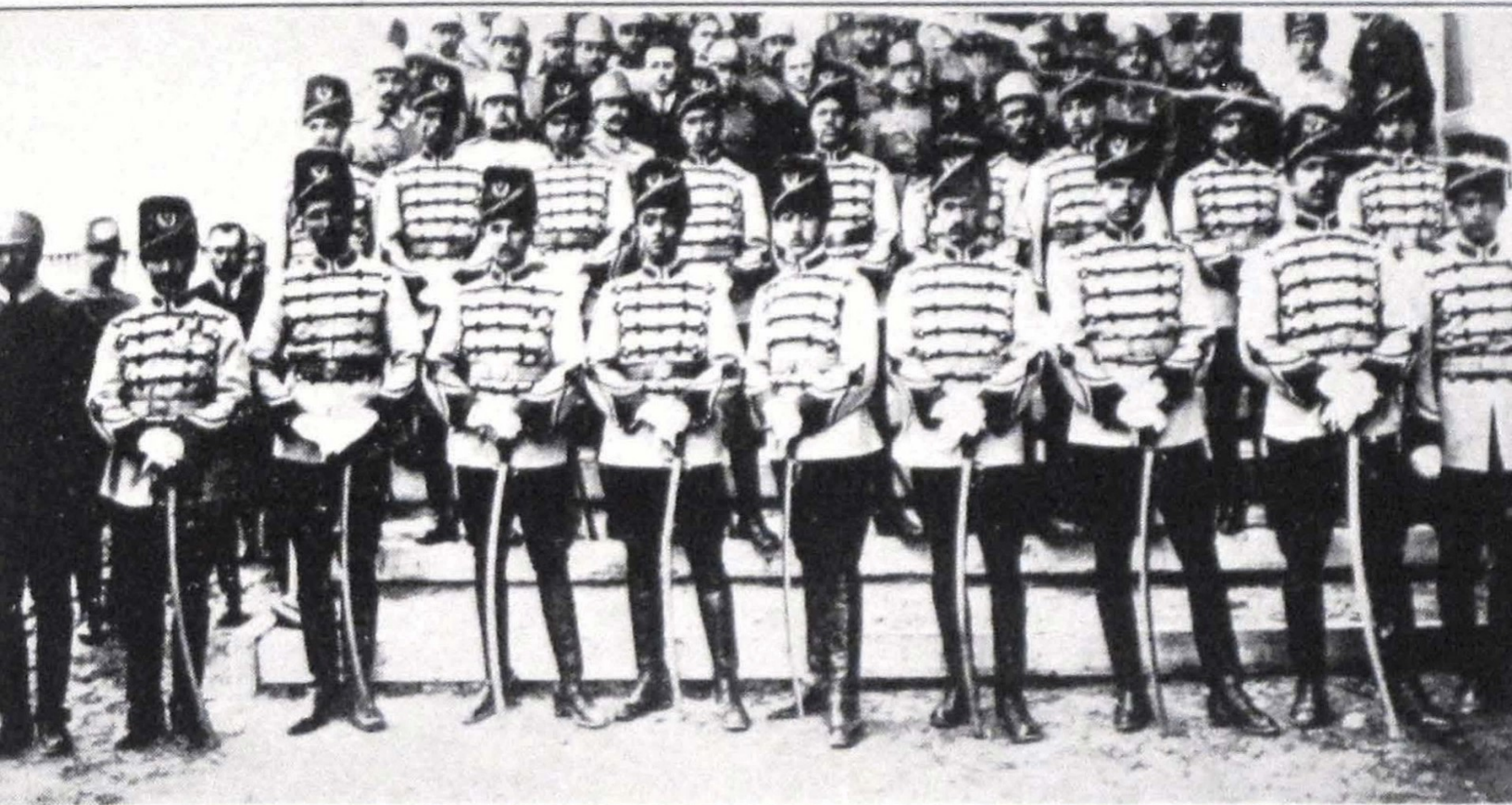
I showed him my watch. It marked five o'clock.

"Sir," said the *babu*. "That is wrong. That is no doubt Kabul time."

We protested, raved, tried bribery, implored, threatened.

"Sir," said the *babu*, "you must go back."

I demanded the right to go to the Khyber Control Office in Landi Khana, four miles up the road.



OFFICERS OF AMANULLAH'S BODYGUARD



WESTERNISED. THE POLICE SET AN EXAMPLE. A GROUP IN KABUL, 19

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“Nobody,” said the *babu*, “can pass the Frontier after six o’clock.”

I demanded the use of a telephone, to inform the Intelligence Department at Landi Kotal. I walked towards the entrance to the camp, where there must be some higher official to whom to apply.

The *babu*, delighted now in his power, turned out the Ghurka Guard. Nobody must go into the camp.

“Here are my rules,” he said. “You may read them. They say that none can pass the Frontier after six o’clock. It is dangerous to be in the Khyber after dusk. If I let you go, you will not reach Peshawar before eight o’clock. Then the Peshawar Gate will be closed for the night. No travellers are allowed in the Pass after dusk. It is too dangerous.”

“Is it not dangerous, then, on the border, half in India and half in Afghanistan?”

“Sir, it is more dangerous. But then, you will understand, we are not responsible. . . .”

A wonderful breed, the *babu*. He is born with the makings of a diplomat. The letter of the law is made for his guidance. He will stick to the letter of the law even at the risk of his own life—and the safety of others.

The driver turned the car. The gates lifted again. We were back in Afghanistan for the night, because it was dangerous to be in the Khyber. Nobody, however, was now responsible.

“Where do we sleep?” I asked the driver.

“It is possible,” he replied, “that you will prefer the Telegraph Office to returning to Dacca.” And thinking of that odoriferous village and the entertaining madman, I chose the Telegraph Office. It would at any rate save us the trouble of refilling the autovac.

The little, dry, and neglected compound of the Telegraph Office was hot and dusty. Four Persian clerks,

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Government employees, rose from their *charpoy*s as we drove in. An old Indian salaamed. The driver spoke to him, and announced that accommodation for me would be found. Food? There would be food. A bed? There would be a bed. Things were not so bad.

They brought a chair into the garden, and I sat there in solitary state, while the Persian clerks chattered lazily, and the old Indian busied about his preparations. Then he came proudly to me and announced that chicken pillau would appear very soon. Would I eat outside, where it was getting cool? I would.

The sun was now over the hills, and the dusk came cool and glamorous. It was a strange situation in which I found myself. Not more than a mile away, I could hear bugle-calls. Then I heard the pipers playing. They must be playing outside the Mess, where the officers were having short drinks before dinner. As I waited for dinner of chicken pillau and water, I could imagine the ice clinking in their glasses, the gay and noisy chatter, the jokes and the banter of a military Mess.

There, all was order and efficiency. Here, all was hidden mystery, a world very old in guile and wickedness. There was civilisation and respectability. Here was a dangerous little corner of the world unvisited by the *feringhe*, a no man's land still. All that lay between us was that strand of barbed wire, and a *babu* with his book of rules and a Ghurka guard.

Nothing is more strict than the Frontier rules of the Khyber. Though, theoretically, I was in Afghan territory, actually I was in the tribal region, surrounded on all sides by the little villages of the hills still undisturbed by any Englishman's wanderings. Sitting there, I remembered all the old tales of soldiers who had been lost in the hills as dusk came on, and never seen again. There had been one or two recent cases, still

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mysterious, but for which the tribes had paid heavily in fines and in punishment. It was still a wild land. The laws of the British in the Khyber were still inflexible, and still prohibited movement among the soldiers after nightfall. The hills still held their fanatics, and the rifle shots, continuing some family feud, still echoed round the hills sometimes to interrupt the chatter in the British Messes.

But the old Indian came with chicken and a huge pile of rice, and I started dinner, alone and very thirsty.

The pillau was very dull, but quite edible. The old man seemed anxious to talk. He told me that it was very strange for a *Sahib* to stay the night at the Telegraph Office. I agreed. He told me that it was in fact quite indefensible for a *Sahib* to stay the night this side of the Frontier. I agreed.

"There are *badmashes* still in the villages," he said. I expressed astonishment.

"The *Sahib* should have gone to Peshawar, or to Landi Kotal," he said. Whole-heartedly I agreed. Then I heard the bugles calling "Lights out" in Landi Kotal. The notes ripped the silence of the hills. It was an eerie place, frowned on by the hills on either side. The Persians yawned and went to sleep.

I saw to the driver, who was already curled up in the driving seat of the car, fast asleep. Then the old man came with a hurricane lamp and showed me the way upstairs. He had fixed up a *charpoy* in the room, and had evidently persuaded the Persian clerks to sleep in the next room. They must have been very crowded, but they had given me a room to myself. I spread out my bedding and went to sleep, waking to the chatter of the clerks just before the sun came up.

Then we pressed a few rupees on the old Indian, started the car, and the gate lifted again to admit us

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into British India. The same *babu* who had refused me, now let me through, signed my passport, and smiled.

“It is dangerous to be round here at night,” he said. “The *Sahib* must remember the difference between Kabul time and British time. . . .”

We climbed up the steep road to Landi Kotal and drove straight to Peshawar Club for beer. The next morning the Afghan Legations all over the world were highly indignant to read that I had predicted the downfall of Amanullah and the collapse of the whole ambitious scheme to Westernise the East. My friend of the *Pravda*, I learnt, had not sent a word from Kabul. It had been well worth the trouble.

During the next few weeks I was busy reading the stilted and slightly contemptuous denials issued by the Afghan Legations, in India, London, and all over Europe. In speeches and in *communiqués* the Ministers issued sarcastic and patronising statements ridiculing the suggestion that Amanullah's reforms meant trouble in Afghanistan. They made interesting reading, and received wide publicity. But I was prepared to wait for a few months.

Actually, I had to wait less than two months. The hint given me by Sir Francis Humphrys, that it would be to everybody's advantage that I should leave Kabul, was well grounded.

But for seven weeks more, no news came out of Afghanistan. The road to Kabul remained clear of trouble. More visitors went to the capital. The British Legation maintained its reputation for hospitality. The visits of the King to talk with Sir Francis grew more frequent and more secretive. The rash programme was still being carried out, with funds shrinking to an even more alarming margin. Men were starving, and

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dacoits were committing deeds of amazing foolhardiness and courage in order to steal grain and food. Ricks were plundered within sight and sound of the Government troops. Discontent was growing, and the Army was still further in arrears with their pay.

It was not till half-way through October, however, that the tide of discontent broke. Even then it was but a small section of the oppressed community that dared show their restiveness. Within a few miles of the Telegraph Office where I had slept the night, the tension broke. A few score men of the tribe of Shinwaris, most conservative, backward, and brave of the tribal races, broke into rebellion against the tax-collectors, routed a small force of Government troops sent to coerce them, and declared themselves openly against Amanullah.

The news did not get across the Border. Amanullah had had minor troubles before, and could easily instruct his agents abroad to depict this as a small rising due to inter-communal disagreements and blood feuds. He did not even take the trouble at first to quash the rebellion. He despatched a small detachment of troops to arrest the leaders, and dropped leaflets from aeroplanes on the surrounding villages, warning the hillmen of the penalties of disorder and resistance.

It is even doubtful whether Amanullah himself saw the portent of this trouble. He did not, at any rate, bother to prepare for a spread of the dissension. He determined to crush the spirit of his people by a further show of force. The drastic programme continued, the taxes still came into the Treasury, wrung from starving peasants.

The legations in London and in India continued to issue boastful and optimistic *communiqués* to the Press. All was well, they said. Amazing progress had been made. With care and tact, the Afghan nation was

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being weaned from its past of dull ignorance into the glorious future of emancipation and freedom. Corruption was being blotted out. Amanullah himself had stated that he was determined to rid his country of the canker at its heart. All was well.

Another announcement stated that the Government cavalry force had been successful against rebel tribes at Ghirzal, on the Kabul to Gadez road, in the Altimar Pass. The rebellion, it was stated, had nothing to do with the new reforms. The Afghan legations were authorised to deny the rumours that objection to the new laws had been responsible for the rising. All was well.

As if in contradiction, however, another item of news came out of Afghanistan. It was to the effect that Amanullah had made a speech on the painful subject of the costs of his tour in Europe. We have seen how liberal he was with the State funds in his gifts to the poor of the eleven capitals which he visited. We have seen the costly entourage which accompanied him.

Yet in that speech, reported in all the newspapers of the world, Amanullah mentioned that the whole cost of the tour had not exceeded the sum of £15,000. . . . It is to be hoped that his importunate questioners were satisfied. It is to be hoped that the educational schemes he had introduced to the country, the unpleasant but doubtless beneficial improvements he had introduced, and the new ideals that now permeated the Government, were considered fully worth that sum.

But an even more fanciful argument was to hand. If they wanted figures, they could have them. If they wanted justification for the trip, here it was. And Amanullah, warming to his work, told his astounded hearers that to set against that expenditure, he had received presents from various countries valued at the

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surprising total of £4,500,000 ! The mind boggles at his arithmetic. We have seen the Rolls-Royce presented by King George. We have seen the orders conferred on his proud breast, to which, perhaps, he attached a monetary value to appease his questioners. There was then, and may be at this moment, a magnificent chestnut stallion in a British Government cavalry depot near Lahore, a present from the King of England. But even after crediting him with these gifts, it is difficult to arrive at the stupendous figure with which Amanullah consoled his critics. Perhaps he added in the date line.

More important than the figures, however, is the fact that he did take the trouble to explain these delicate financial matters in public. This did not seem to be the manner of Amanullah the Fearless, who hitherto had brooked no criticism from any of his subjects.

This was already recognised, therefore, as a different matter from the trouble he had had four years before, when the men of Khost rose up against him, headed by a queer legendary figure known as the "Lame Mullah," and recruited the sympathy of the whole district against new laws which were said to be contrary to the Koran. On that occasion, after a hard though short struggle, the rebels had been taught a severe lesson, executions followed, and trials for heresy terrified the ringleaders.

But Amanullah was not altogether in a mood for forgiveness and excuses. Even in face of this active disagreement in the south, he pressed on with reforms. A new staff college was opened at Khurd Zabitan for cadets, controlled by Turkish officers, by now regarded in much the same light as Victorian mothers regarded French novelists. Sixty-five officers were sent to France, Italy, Germany, and Russia for training, and twenty came to England. Fifteen students went to Baku for modern training in oil-fields. Among the importations

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was a foreign financial adviser, who acted as a sort of inquisitor into the expenses of the State Ministers, and was highly unpopular in consequence. Persian script was abolished by Royal decree, though the enterprising firms had bought typewriters equipped with the complicated language for all their future bookwork. Latin script was substituted for general use. And as one of the final blows to tradition, there came, soon after the fateful Parliament, an order enforcing the wearing of European clothes in every public street in Kabul.

The Kabul tailors were not miracle workers. They had done fairly well over the huge order for the making of "European clothes" for the Members of the first Afghan Parliament. They were completely vanquished, however, by the flood of orders that deluged them when the King's decree was made known. And the consequence was that in order to comply with the command, many financially depressed young men of Kabul had to go to the local dealer for real European clothes and pay extortionate sums for suits which had their prices doubled by the stern Afghan Customs. It seemed a delicious case of turning out Peter's pockets to pay Paul.

And hardly was that order enforced, to the general anger of every citizen who disliked making a fool of himself, than new laws appeared governing his eating habits. This seemed going a little too far, and it is certain that the mullahs made full opportunity of the religious objections to the new order.

It was still officially emphasised that the trouble in the south was unconnected with these measures, and that the people of Kabul were still enthusiastic about the modernity craze that had overtaken them. At last, however, the pretence could no longer be maintained. Amanullah himself went to Jallalabad, there to conduct the operations against the Shinwaris.

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A side-issue was the rising of the ever-ready bands of marauders and brigands. One such band, headed by a notorious robber and murderer named Ayab Khan, took, as their excuse for wholesale robbery, the nationalisation decrees issued by the King. Out came all their old battle-cries. They protested once more that, being border tribesmen, they owed no more than formal allegiance to Amanullah. Eventually they came out into the open with public protests, and attacked and killed a Government servant, later turning on the garrison at Kahi and capturing the fort. Amanullah boiled with anger, and sent down his aeroplanes, piloted by Russians, who showed their skill and efficiency by dropping well-aimed bombs on the homes and villages of the outlaws, inflicting terrific damage and spreading slaughter in a thoroughly modern and Western manner.

The rebellion was well started, but it was not till well into November that it was generally recognised outside Afghanistan that this was a real movement against Amanullah's Westernisation-by-force.

Minor grievances of course entered into the dispute. Each tribe in the south had its own private complaint. One was shared between the Shias and Sunnis, two of the most warlike and independent sects in the whole country, who claimed aggressively the right to settle their own little differences without the interference of the State. Apparently some of Amanullah's officials had taken it upon themselves to involve the Government in purely private squabbles, pushing the long arm of the law into the hills and checking family feuds, and generally complicating the whole business between the two tribes when they met in honourable combat. Such conduct could not be tolerated by worthy Afghan fighting men, and the peacemaker suffered the usual fate of his kind.

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Amanullah was now well into civil war. Nor did the course of justice run so smoothly, in spite of the havoc caused by the aeroplanes, and the thrills that he experienced when at last he saw his troops marching into battle. For these same troops seemed to have very regrettable habits. Many of them deserted. Many of them sold their rifles and equipments to their enemies in return for food and money, both sadly lacking in all Government ranks.

It was terribly cold on night duty in the hills that December. Snow lay four feet deep in the passes. It was boring and not a little frightening for men who had joined the Army in the first place for decorative purpose. And hence a strange feature of the new Afghan Army. Even in the Khyber Pass, there could be heard, regularly through the night, occasional rifle shots from the camps of the Government Army. Though there could be no possibility of finding a target, and though it was known that the hillmen would wait to be attacked in their own fastnesses, the night silence was punctuated at regular intervals by these solitary shots. The reason was a very human one. The Afghan sentries, numb with cold at their posts, were firing occasional rounds for the sole reason of warming the barrels of their rifles and using them as radiators. Such unmilitary methods must have caused the soldier-King acute discomfort and shame.

The next setback was the capture of Pesh Bolak Fort from the State troops, a feat that could only have been performed by the virtual surrender of the garrison. The daily depletion of the ranks could be noticed. The pride of Amanullah's soldierly heart was humbled by desertions in mass. And to heap humiliation on his head, there came news from Kabul that revolt had spread even to the city that seemed so loyal.

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At that moment Amanullah sat in his tent in the valley near Jallalabad, and bowed his head in disappointment. He must have seen the beginning of the end. The pretence was over. He had lost a gamble which was bound to finish in one way only. At that moment he must have tasted a bitterness specially reserved for the leaders of men who find their trust betrayed. His still-youthful hopes were dashed to the ground. His misery was only increased in proportion to the ideals he had fostered.

And he had been an ambitious man.

CHAPTER XIII

THE RISE OF A BANDIT—"ROBIN HOOD OF THE HILLS"—
THE LEGATION BESIEGED—'PLANES TO THE RESCUE—
AN EPIC OF THE AIR

AMANULLAH went back to Kabul with kingship collapsing about his ears. The first news to greet him was of a new and terrible personality in the opposing forces. On the lips of everyone in Kabul was the name of Bacha Sachao, son of a water-carrier.

So far as can be learned, it was the first time that his name had been heard in Kabul. With it came fantastic stories of his strength, his cruelty, and his daring. It was said that he strode the hills with the steps of a giant. He became a will-o'-the-wisp character, appearing suddenly in the remote villages, pillaging and burning, rape and slaughter his maxims of victory. They said that he was afflicted with an ugliness hardly human, and that he was dressed with all the magnificence of an old-time pirate. He revelled in his physical deformities, and played the joker with Satanic zest.

Other names he had. He robbed, so they said, only the rich, and with the proceeds of his villainy repaid the poor. So they called him "Robin Hood of the hills." His Rabelaisian wit, his ingenuity in devising new schemes of inhuman punishment, and his braggadocio earned him a terrified respect. And he was no figment of imagination, but a living figure who now menaced Kabul, and with it Amanullah's kingdom.

Amanullah listened while he was told of the imminent

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descent of his new enemy on the capital. Bacha Sachao, it was said, had toured the villages of the plains, gathered round him the most violent characters and the hardiest fighters, and was even now on his swift way to lay Kabul waste. The King's answer was quick and to the point. The Government printing presses that very day poured out notices in the vernacular.

“ Rs 500 Reward !

For capture, dead or alive, of Bacha Sachao, the Brigand.

Sd. AMANULLAH.”

The notice was posted up on every telegraph post on the Kabul-Jallalabad Road, on every wall in Kabul City, on a house in every village within a radius of twenty miles north of the capital. Bacha Sachao replied in characteristic style. One day the notice was torn down, and another, roughly made, was substituted.

“ Rs 1000 Reward !

For capture, dead or alive, of Amanullah, the Infidel.

Sd. BACHA SACHAO.”

A joke, this, which well suited the Afghan mentality.

And this Robin Hood of the hills, boasting and threatening, went his triumphant way, stirring up the villages against the infidel who now sat on a tottering throne.

First news of the water-carrier's son came in early December, but his name had already been heard for some months in the northern region where he held sway. Already the rebellion had spread to the whole State. Already the Government troops had suffered a decisive defeat. And, at long last, the outside world had come to realise that this was no mere local rising which could be put down after a single campaign.

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Jallalabad was the first to suffer. Being near the scene of the first rising, the local people had had opportunities of seeing the slight resistance of the Government troops, and had long cast envious eyes on the Royal Palace there and its stock of valuable goods, imported from the West and therefore surely responsible for the present trouble.

On December 3 large bands of tribesmen, having first destroyed the bridges, had appeared outside the gates of the fair city. The two thousand troops stationed there at first stood firm, and resisted every attempt at negotiation. The men of the city were terrified. They knew well enough that in the event of an attack, the lawless hillmen who now menaced them would allow no qualms to check a wholesale sack of the rich bazaar, the despoiling of women, their delight in the murder of able-bodied men. And on the walls of Jallalabad, late that evening, there appeared the old men of the city, holding Korans in their hands, in supplication to the waiting tribesmen outside.

“ You are not fighting us,” cried the old men. “ You are fighting Government troops. Go, then, to the military lines, and leave the city alone. We of Jallalabad are with you, and will pray for you. We believe in your protests against the Kafir who calls himself King. Leave us, therefore, and leave our city. Your enemies are the troops ! ”

One by one the old men dropped from the wall, shot by the casual rifle-fire of the besiegers. Then they entered the city, and the smoke rose high above the Afghan Plain that night, while in the red glow of burning houses, there rose the shrieks of those who had dared to argue in the face of an Afghan tribesman.

They made short work of the troops. Eight hundred lay dead the next morning. The rest deserted. The

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raiders collected their precious new rifles and openly issued a challenge to the King whom they had called Kafir, or Infidel.

Their next advance was on the Royal Palace, now unguarded, and in the dawn they revelled in such a glorious welter of destruction that even the Plain was lit for miles around by the flames from that ornate, well-stocked, and pleasant building. The red glow showed the demented bands of tribesmen holding orgy of destruction among the "infidel's" Western imports. Furniture from Regent Street, brocades from Bond Street, carpets from the Rue de la Paix, costly presents from the crowned heads and the Presidents of Europe, were piled on the hungry flames.

Revenge was sweet and savage. The tribesmen yelled their ecstasy, piled more and more on the flames, and triumphed in the greatness of Allah who had given them this reward for their patience. For two days the flames did their work, and then the wrecked and pillaged city, razed to the ground, became the feasting ground of the vultures. The tribesmen departed, with a burnt and blackened city as their challenge to Amanullah.

His reply was the suggestion of a *jirga*, and a truce. It was, indeed, officially held, though it is doubtful whether very many of the insurgents heard about it. From the Arg, the great fort which is part of the Kabul Palace grounds, he issued a new declaration cancelling some of his latest edicts. But it was too late. The effect was nil.

At one stroke he abolished the law decreeing European clothing in Kabul. But this was in the manner of an anti-climax, for there were few who remained faithful to the law in these days. He further abolished his objectionable decree prohibiting polygamy among the officials of the State. He tried to patch up a truce with

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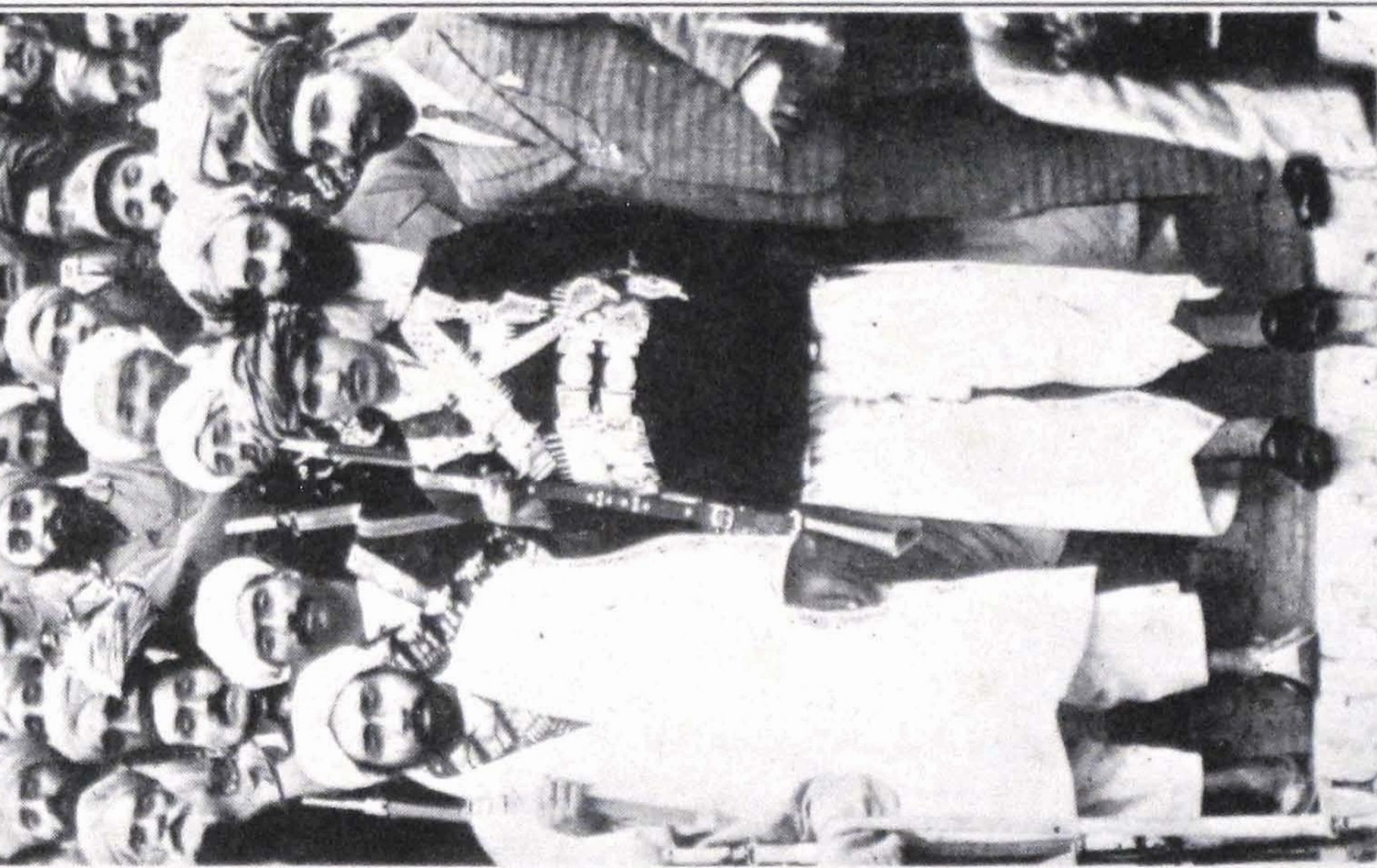
the mullahs, now led by the formidable Mullah of Chaknaur. He was too late. The mullahs had suffered long enough the gradual dwindling of their prestige, and were determined to reinstate themselves in power by more drastic methods. They even seemed to be siding with the water-carrier's son, a strange course, for he was unclean in the sight of Allah, and of one of the lowest and most servile castes in the country.

Bacha Sachao, however, interspersed his bloodthirsty threats with holy oaths, and the name of Allah was often on his lips. Everything he did, apparently, was in the cause of Allah. The mullahs, doubtless with tongues in their cheeks, lent him their support, seeing in him a champion for the lost privileges of the priests.

The sole remaining arm of his services upon which Amanullah could rely were the Russian pilots and their aeroplanes. He sent them on extensive tours of the country, armed with leaflets, which he had dropped in every large village. In the leaflets he reminded his people of the certain misery they would incur by their opposition to the King. He informed them of his recent concessions to popular demand, and assured them, speaking presumably on behalf of Allah, that not only in this world, but in the next, they would be condemned to an existence of sorrow and misery. Once again, the effect was nil, and the next time the pilots soared away from Kabul, they carried bombs instead of leaflets as their cargo.

All the roads were now impassable. Bridges were torn up to prevent the movement of troops. Great logs had been hauled across the roads. The telegraph lines were cut. Kabul was isolated. Fears began to be entertained for the safety of the British Legation.

There were, so far as was known, sixteen British subjects, of whom four were women and three were



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children. There were eight Indian women on the staff, with five children. The Legation had no wireless instrument, either to receive or transmit messages, for owing to some prejudice, the Afghan authorities had objected to the proposal for such an instrument to be in the possession of the foreign representatives. The telegraph line was broken. Messages by hand were uncertain and dangerous. And for several weeks there had been no news of any sort from the British Minister. Even in November, early in the trouble, only two mails had got through from Kabul.

There could be no possibility of sending help by road. The religious fanaticism of the rebels had taken a strange turn, and their venom was now directed against every inanimate object in any way connected with the King's Westernisation programme. The ruins of twenty-six Italian lorries, gutted by fire, stood on the Peshawar-Kabul road. Travellers were held up and robbed. There could be no sense in risking even disguised messengers on the route.

The Legation itself was in a dangerous situation. It was in fact directly in the line of fire between the few loyal Government troops and the artillery of the rebels, and although there had as yet been no pitched battle in Kabul, there was every likelihood of one beginning very soon.

On the 18th of December, therefore, a lone British scout circled over Kabul City and swooped lower near the Legation, neatly dropping a package in the compound. The pilot saw it hastily retrieved, and circled again to await a reply. Figures ran out of the Legation with white strips of paper and linen. These they placed on the ground, making a message. "All's well," it read. "Fly high. Don't attempt to land."

At the same time it was officially and very tardily

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announced by Army Headquarters in India that there had been a strange accident a few days before this incident. A Government *communiqué* stated that a British scouting machine, flying over Kabul, had got into difficulties, and had made a forced landing near the city. The pilots were safe, and it had been ascertained that they had gained the shelter of the Legation. Only after some inquiries was it learnt that they had in fact landed on the Government flying ground, still in the possession of Amanullah's troops, and had retired safely to the Legation, carrying certain instruments from their machine.

The naïve statement was thought likely to hide the real truth, to the effect that by a simple ruse, and probably with the consent of Amanullah, a wireless transmitting instrument and at least one wireless expert had been introduced into the Kabul Legation.

Meanwhile, things were going from bad to worse with Amanullah. He had seen two forts, close to Kabul, surrender to the rebels. Desertions were now common. The very real fear existed from day to day that Bacha Sachao would appear at the gates of Kabul and wipe it free of any vestige of Royal family, modernisation, foreigners, or indeed any traces of the much-boasted new régime.

Russians, Germans, French, and Italians realised that their lives were in perpetual danger. At the same time they appreciated that, for some unknown reason, the British Legation offered the greatest shelter from the terror both within and without the gates of Kabul. Many of them applied for, and were offered, accommodation in that great white house on the outskirts of the city, over which flew the Union Jack.

Although in considerable danger, two Englishmen attached to the Legation made their way outside the

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walls in the dusk, and conducted into safety several European women who were afraid to move from their houses. Food was scarce in the Legation, but everything had been long ago arranged in case of such a catastrophe, and it was assured by secret messages from the British Minister that the tinned food kept in stock would last a considerable time.

The interior of the Legation took on the character of an overcrowded but orderly fort. Women slept in the basement, and their comfort and their morale was well cared for by Lady Humphrys. Sandbags were prepared in case of dire need, and the women were set to work making bandages in the event of any of the guards being hit when the real attack on the Royal Palace, now hourly awaited, should begin.

It was hardly thought that the rebels would turn their attention to the British Legation, and Sir Francis Humphrys was in full confidence that he would be able to keep British territory free from molestation. It was, however, as well to be on the safe side, and the grisly history of Englishmen in Kabul must have caused him some anxious forebodings.

The Legation was particularly liable to the stray shots from both sides. Sir Francis knew enough about the mechanical efficiency of both Afghan tribesmen and Government troops to be aware that very many of the shells from the artillery, when brought into use, would fall sadly astray. It was hardly to be expected that the British Legation, so unfortunately placed between the two opposing sides, would escape scot-free.

Two days before Christmas a decisive decision was made. Some days before that I had heard a rumour in India that the women would be evacuated by aeroplane. It was, indeed, strongly felt in India that such

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a step should be taken without delay. And at half-past ten one morning, the Kabulis must have been amazed to see a great Vickers bomber, its wings marked with the circles of the British Air Force, circling over the city once and alighting gently on the Afghan Government landing-ground. Nobody yet knew what would be the outcome of that courageous move.

It is presumed, however, that steps had been taken to ensure that its arrival and its departure would be safe from the attentions of either side. Amanullah's anxiety to prevent the embroilment of foreigners in the civil war was well known. The safeguarding of the ticklish operation from the hostility of the rebel troops, however, was another matter. It can only be assumed that Sir Francis Humphrys, like a wise neutral, had managed to extract promises from both sides for the safe conduct of the machine.

The aeroplane had come from Peshawar, and had made the journey of 140 miles direct in an hour and a half. It had traversed country of the wildest description. Anywhere on the route, a mechanical failure would have meant disaster. Quite apart from the hostile and inflamed tribesmen and brigands who haunted the country, there was, ever present, the risk of a forced landing in that mountainous territory.

The temperature was several degrees below freezing-point in Kabul. The pilots froze, even in their electrically warmed suits. Every flight was a chance in the dark, for the coming of more snow was expected any day, and a snowstorm would mean certain disaster in the bad visibility.

All these points were taken into consideration when, for the first time, aeroplanes were used for the evacuation of the besieged. History was being made, by young casual adventurers who set off from Peshawar on an

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errand of mercy dramatic in its results and noteworthy in its success.

That cold morning, the day before Christmas Eve, twenty women and children were hurried from the protecting walls of the British Legation. They were bundled rapidly into the huge cabin of the 'plane. They brought with them only pathetic little parcels of precious possessions, and were wrapped up roughly with rugs, leather coats, and scarves belonging to Air Force officers. Among them was Lady Humphrys, who waved a farewell to her husband, well dressed and debonair as ever, as he saw to the rapid departure of the little party. The 'plane set its nose again for the south, and an hour and a half later landed on the Peshawar flying-ground with its precious human cargo.

That was the first of a steady programme which continued until the first week in February. Nearly every day, 'planes set off from Peshawar. Often they were prevented by bad visibility, but often they set off in spite of the threat of snow and an early mist which clouded the hills. By the 7th of February, when the last trip was made to bring Sir Francis Humphrys, and the last remaining members of the Legation, no less than 308 men, women, and children had been transported to safety. There were British, Indians, Germans, Italians, and French. There was not a single casualty or accident in the whole operation, save when a German woman stepped into the sweep of the propellers while waiting at Kabul, and was killed.

During the latter flights, also, Amanullah had gone, and the safeguarding of the 'planes while they were on the ground at Kabul was a more delicate matter, as will be seen. The engines were never able to stop while on the ground. To save time, the propellers were whirring during the whole period that the passengers

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were being bundled into the cabins. More troop-carriers came from Cairo and Baghdad to help in the work. There was never a hitch, though every expert in the Air Force waited with bated breath while the machines were on their journeys.

One of the refugees reached Lahore after her flight from Kabul with only the clothes she stood up in. She was Mrs. Isaacson, an American woman on her honeymoon. Her husband and she had essayed a trip round the world, and had arrived in Kabul just before the road was destroyed and the bridges burned. In spite of offers to take him back to India and safety with his wife, Mr. Isaacson refused to abandon his Ford car, and after sticking out the siege of Kabul, drove over the hills to Kandahar and eventually arrived in Quetta, where I met him, very happy with two Afghan wolf-hounds which he had collected. That honeymoon had already embraced a rebellion in China, and was further enlivened by the downfall of a régime in Afghanistan. A wonderful breed, the American motorists. . . .

Rescue of the women besieged in Kabul had been effected not a day too early. On December 28, the tense and fretful forces joined issue, and there raged in the outskirts of the city a battle which was destined to be protracted and savage. It lasted a full ten days and nights, though fitful and indecisive, before either side cracked under the strain.

Bacha Sachao was now in the thick of the fighting. He sent jeering messages to the King's forces, with threats of the ingenious deaths that they would die. He exposed himself foolhardily to the stray bullets that whistled round the outskirts of the city. He was here, there, and everywhere. None could resist his bravado and his examples of bravery. There was come to Kabul a real leader of men.

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As an added encouragement to the rebels, they had behind them now the full support of the mullahs. The latter had conveniently forgotten the fact that Bacha Sachao was the humble son of a water-carrier, and of the lowest caste in the country. They ignored for the time being the fact that association with him meant the defiling of their bodies and their own high prestige. They were always blessed, as has been seen before, with sound common sense, and presumably they considered that the will of Allah could best be served by linking their forces with this rampaging outlaw of the hills. Any method was good enough to get rid of Amanullah, the infidel, even though the services of another religious outcast were to be condoned. Allah, they judged, would be tolerant in these little details.

They worked well and successfully in the ranks of the rebel soldiery. They promised glory for the wounded in battle, and eternal peace for the dead. They prophesied the end of warfare with the end of Amanullah, though perhaps this argument was ill-chosen in view of the splendid time being had by all. They drew attention to the large Government granaries which would soon be at their disposal, and unceasingly stressed the religious motives of this movement to rid Allah of a tyrant.

An even more satisfactory promise was that of revenge on the foreign officers and officials on whom they laid the blame for their present troubles. In particular, they resolved to exterminate the hated Russians who now piloted the Government aeroplanes. Amanullah, if he thought to break their spirit with the daily shower of bombs, fundamentally misjudged his own people. The mere fact of employing Russians as incendiaries, to slaughter them in such impersonal and unromantic manner, hardened the spirit of revolt against him. The

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Russians were to pay a terrible price for their participation.

The attitude, traditional in the Afghan, of hostility to the foreigner on principle, was now to be clearly noticeable.

Though so far the rebels had respected the property of foreigners, and had not attempted any attack on the legations, the text of a new demand sent to Amanullah showed their feelings. They did not promise anything. Their declaration was in the nature of a statement of their grievances. And prominent among these was the presence of foreign legations in their capital. Undoubtedly they regarded the diplomatic relations with other countries as the chief causes of their troubles. The declaration gave full satisfaction to the mullahs, who saw that with a little diplomacy they could divert these sentiments into a renewal of the old prestige they had enjoyed.

But at the moment, motives and ideals were subjugated to action. The troops were having interesting experiments with the guns. Only a few of them professed familiarity with the artillery, but they were always willing to try. And day by day the guns boomed, and the rebels pumped shot and shell in the vague direction of the Palace, revelling in an orgy of destruction and considering themselves fortunate if the shell-bursts were observed to be near their mark.

More and more irregular troops were pouring into the old city. Every outlaw, absent from Kabul many years through fear of the new régime, now came down from the fastnesses of the hills to make merry in a city of chaos. The dregs of the mountain bands who had ravaged villages and pillaged farms and outlying hamlets, now surged into the alleyways of Kabul. The word had spread rapidly. There would be no retribution for

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the outcast in the exciting and pleasure-loving capital any more.

The wine shops were full. The brothels were the scene day and night of uproarious, fighting crowds. The shopkeepers kept a wary eye on the temper of the mob. The money-changers hid their golden and copper heaps away from the sight of men. There were no police. They had reverted to civilian clothes and civilian occupations. Kabul was on the spree in its own bloodthirsty way.

There are no figures of the casualties on either side. It is fair to assume that they did not reach any startling number. Eye-witnesses have said, however, that the streets were foul with the dead bodies, and it can be assured that arrangements for the succour of the wounded were not very elaborate. They died where they had fallen.

Every public service was neglected. The water supply was long since cut. The streets were left with their debris unmoved. The ponies that drew the little native carts through the bazaar often shied at a body lying in the gutter.

The electric light soon failed. Nobody minded. Kabul reverted to its customary state. Everyone was very happy, very boastful, very bloodthirsty when thought was given to the remnants of Amanullah's defenders, and remarkably bawdy in language and deed.

The battle grew fiercer and more concentrated. The Palace must be a shambles by now. Still the defenders held on.

One or two loyal soldiers had been captured, and their execution in the public highway provided the besiegers with a welcome diversion. Some were crucified. Some were shot. Some were beaten and tortured before being

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left for dead in the streets. It was all very entertaining for the Kabuli.

Meanwhile the aeroplanes came daily to the landing-ground, collected their quota of German and French and Italian and Russian refugees, and returned to Peshawar.

New Year passed, and the fort still held its own. Food was short, but Amanullah still resisted the concentrated attacks on his domain. Not till the 6th of January was there any indication of the patience of Bacha Sachao being exhausted. And as dusk fell, he decided on a last concentrated shelling of the King's Palace, a climax to the ten days and nights of steady battering.

CHAPTER XIV

HELL BREAKS LOOSE—THE SPEECH THAT SAVED A SLAUGHTER
—FLIGHT OF A KING—THE THREE-DAY RULER—A
MYSTERY TRAIN THROUGH INDIA

THAT night, January 6, 1929, hell broke loose in Kabul. Old Bala Hissar in ruins looking over the city, with a wealth of bloody memories saturating the old stones, could surely never have known a position of such delicacy. The scene was lit by the flames from granaries and houses on the outskirts of the city. Up in the hills, at Paghman, there was a glow in the sky which promised ill for some of the modern buildings and the fancy, elaborate new cinema.

In Kabul bazaar itself there was darkness. Every shop was shuttered and barred. Men hurried through the streets, watching their step and peering round the corners before they advanced further. There was a noisy gathering in one of the compounds, and it is evident that the old Afghan had broken his bonds of abstinence for just that night.

But out near the Royal Palace, and in the roads leading about the foreign legations, the noise reached its crescendo.

No history book will ever tell the full details of how Sir Francis Humphrys persuaded both sides in a bloody domestic war to keep off British soil. No bald explanation will describe why only sixty shells were found in the British Legation after that night of horror. The secret is with the present High Commissioner for Iraq, and perhaps he will admit that he does not really under-

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stand why his advice to the two opposing armies, the one royal and the other violently revolutionary, should have spared the property and the lives of hated Englishmen and foreigners.

Amanullah hourly counted the number of men remaining faithful to him. They were growing less in the collapsing Palace. The women were in the basement, on their knees in prayer, appealing to Allah to save them from the mob that howled at the gates and directed frequent rifle fire at every window and loophole.

Heavy shot rained into the Palace. The compound was a churned-up shambles. The great rooms, filled with the wreckage of furniture, silks, and brocades bought during the London visit, were strewn with the dead and dying. One room gaped open to the dark sky. Every moment there came the crash of falling masonry.

But through the chaos there stalked Amanullah, a smoking rifle in his hands. He was sweating and white-faced. His clothes were torn, and the chalk of the crumbling walls was over him. He was unhurt by the bullets, but it could be seen that he had had some narrow escapes.

But his eyes flashed still, even in the hour when he knew he was beaten. He had seen treachery in his own house. He had shot down four men whom he had seen leaving for the shelter of the crowd outside. He knew he was finished.

Some few of his last faithful followers had already been captured by the rebels. From the shattered window he could see the brilliant lights of the execution place, whither they were dragged after being shot. He knew that, within a few hours at the most, his probable fate would be there, in the hands of men whose blood-lust was up.

There were many children in the basement with the

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women. Fat Inayatullah was with him in the central court, perhaps seeing at last that there must be something in this training for warfare. . . . Relatives and friends and courtiers were there, directing the occasional fire of the soldiers from the upper storeys.

But bullets were precious. The Palace was never an armoury, and he knew now that the mob from the hills had broken their way into the arsenal and were using, for the first time in their lives, new Italian and French rifles, with which they were delighted, and thousands of rounds per man. They had reached, too, the heavy artillery, so long the prize of Amanullah's heart.

There came again the boom of a gun, and the Palace rocked with the shock as the compound was churned up once more with high explosive. The shells were coming over the British Legation, most of them sadly missing their mark, but many of them being sufficiently close to make Amanullah realise that sooner or later a lucky shot would crumple up the remains of his last bolting hole.

From behind, came a reply from the last of his gallant band of artillerymen who had remained loyal. The shell screamed over the British Legation, and the crash of its landing near the old parade ground caused him to wonder whether by chance one might strike the arsenal and end, once and for all, the history of Kabul and all its inhabitants.

Only sixty shells were so wide of the mark as to fall in the Legation. About half this number failed to explode. But, often enough, the desperate King must have given a thought to how Sir Francis was faring.

As a fact, conditions in the Legation were much better than in the Royal Palace. One or two of the outlying residences were razed to the ground. The structure was pitted with bullet holes, and shells had torn off portions

of the walls. Inside, Sir Francis Humphrys ensured that, except for the guards at their posts, no man should expose himself to danger. The guards were instructed not to fire at any cost, but to preserve the neutrality of the Legation. The Union Jack still flew at the flag-pole, and the outer gates were closed, with but a small guard in the guardhouse to deal with any who might seek to break in.

At any moment the temper of the mob might be turned against the British. Fortunately, Sir Francis was the best known and the most popular of all the ambassadors in Kabul. He was known, not only in the city, but in far-away villages where he had rested the night on shooting expeditions.

An Afghan never forgets. They recalled his familiarity with their language, his sympathy with their problems, and, perhaps of primary importance, his love of *shikar* and his prowess after game. He had allowed them to finger his rifles, had shown many of the villagers the latest thing in bullets, and had talked to them like brothers on their kindred subject of sport in their native hills.

Lady Humphrys had often accompanied him on these trips. She had camped the night outside their villages, had thanked them for their gifts of milk and food, and had shown herself ready and willing to interest herself in their lives.

Perhaps those shooting expeditions were responsible to a great extent for the preservation of the British Legation that night, and prevented the repetition of yet another of those horrors which had cost Britain dear in lives in Afghanistan's bloody history.

But nevertheless everything was prepared in the Legation. The basement was sandbagged. Every man was given his task to perform.

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Once at least, Sir Francis had to sally out from the shelter of the Legation to deal with arrogant crowds outside the walls. I recalled how, a month before, I had asked him how he would deal with an armed mob round the Legation walls. He had but a small guard of Indian cavalry, mainly for State occasions, and there could be no possibility of the Legation withstanding a long siege against an armed force.

“I have thought of that,” he told me. “And I will tell you what I would do. I would talk to them. . . .”

The thing sounds fantastic, even in the fantastic history of Afghanistan. But when danger threatened, Sir Francis stood on the wall, in full view of them, and—talked.

Nobody will ever know what he said. These conversations do not appear in diplomatic reports. In any case, to judge by his knowledge of their language, and to judge further by the Rabelaisian nature of all their similes and epigrams, the speech that saved the British Legation in Kabul was not couched in terms that would be edifying to the British Foreign Office. . . .

Your Afghan is beautifully emphatic in his choice of terms, but he is not always ladylike in his selection. His illustrations of an argument, and much of his conversation, are in the form of allegory, and are drawn from the necessary but seldom mentioned activities of life.

So Sir Francis spoke, a white-clad figure on the high walls, while below him there ranged two hundred of the wildest characters in a wild country. They had tasted blood. They had seen men dragged from their homes, shot, and burned. They had seen the last agonies of men on the cross. They had seen the splinters of men blown from cannon—all in that night of fire and blood and pillage.

Here was the Legation. Inside were representatives of

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the Power that Afghans had always subconsciously believed to be their oppressors. Had not this dog of an Amanullah, whom now they were going to tread into the dust, learned his modern foolishness and his heresies in the very country of these white puppies ?

“ Come,” said their leaders, “ away with them ! ”

But they listened to the man talking to them from the Legation walls. He was unarmed. He had a cigarette in one hand. He laughed at them. He reviled them, cursed them, called them such names as are given only to an enemy firmly in your grasp. Then he joked. He seemed to enjoy his position. He made them laugh at his own “ discomfiture,” as he put it. He told them there was nothing for them in the Legation, and that in any case they might not touch it if there were. This was not Afghanistan, inside these walls. This was *his* house, and the house of *his* Government !

“ Begone then, Afghans, I have nothing to do with your troubles ! I will not interfere if you do not interfere with me ! Your leader, even, the Robin Hood of the hills, has promised me security from you. Bacha Sachao has told you begone about your business ! I will have no more of you . . . ! ”

And while they still listened, he had jumped down from the wall, and made his way into the Legation.

The mob looked at one another. “ Evidently we did wrong,” they must have said to each other. “ He has nothing to do with that Amanullah. And we have known him as a great hunter. . . . ”

The British Legation was saved that night, by a bit of eloquence (and a nice bit of well-chosen vulgarity ?)

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Kabul was once more the scene of riotous and merry slaughter. Old feuds were ended, by the elimination of



BACHA SACHAO, THE BANDIT KING, MAKING
A SPEECH



HENCHMEN OF A BANDIT KING. BACHA SACHAO'S FOLLOWERS

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one of the parties. Old family quarrels were continued with the knife instead of through the law. A few houses were sacked for loot. A few wealthy shopkeepers were mourned ever afterwards by their relatives.

Ram Prasad, my old friend of the white breeches, was found in the morning with his throat cut. He had, it was said, extorted too great a tax from all who wished to enter the service of the King in his Majesty's garage. He would no longer drive the big black Rolls that was a present from the King of England. He would no longer show me or anybody else what the little sporting Rolls could do on Kabul's best public highway.

Ram Prasad had overdone it, and he died in the same artistic manner as many another minor potentate died that night.

Dawn broke. The sun struggled through the mists of the hills before it reached another mist lying over Kabul. The black cloud drifted, not from the dew gathered by the sunbeams, but from the carnage of the night. Kabul was scarred and eaten away with fire. Hardly a wall stood whole outside the native city. Blackened ruins showed their ugly sides, and in many a road there were the loathsome remains of a public execution. The smell hung heavily on the morning air. Burnt flesh could be traced, and the sharp tang of gunpowder. But the Palace still stood, wrecked but inviolate, for the mob never knew that inside its walls only a few survived to fight on under the whip of Amanullah's tongue.

The attackers had drawn off, to reap the advantage of their descent into Kabul from their lonely villages. The townspeople took the easier course. There was food for the asking. There was drink for those who wished to celebrate their immunity from the bullets of "the traitor King." The merchants bribed them off from

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further attacks on property by giving them the necessities of life.

And while they rested throughout that morning ; while Bacha Sachao, the Robin Hood of the hills, drew ever closer to the capital, issuing threats as he came ; while Sir Francis Humphrys assured the British Foreign Office that all was well ; there came over the hills from the north a big monoplane with the identification marks of Russia on its wing.

Amanullah the Brave was off.

Some time during the night he had suffered the last indignity that can be heaped upon a ruler. He had seen his dreams crumbling with his Palace. He had tasted the bitterness of utter and final defeat. He had had to recall with cynicism those fine words of hope for the future which I had heard him mutter only a few months past.

Sadly he announced his decision to his forlorn relatives. Sadly he bid them gather up their belongings, as many as could fit into the cockpit of an aeroplane. Where could he go for safety ?

And with a gesture that might have been one of defiance, but proved to be one of pathos, he chose Kandahar. There might still remain some of the faithful who had followed the most eagerly his plans for the future. Stubbornly he refused to believe that this was more than a raid engineered by brigands of the hills for his undoing. Never for a moment did he see the downfall of a Kingdom. But the Royal Seal was used again. With a pathetic trust in the unchangeability of kingship, he issued a new decree reversing his orders for the modernisation of the East. He issued the greatest retrograde order ever made under the Royal Seal of any country.

“ Back to the primitive ! ” was the keynote.

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“As you were! You are the East, and cannot ever adopt the customs of the West! Throw away your Western trappings, your boots, walking-sticks, overcoats, French hats, German suits, and British manners! Return to the blanket if you need warmth, and to the knife if you need defence against a foe! The West is not for you! Afghanistan must go back, not forward . . . !”

Such was the meaning of his last Order as a King. Perhaps at the last his tongue was in his cheek. Kabul was already back fifty years. Not a clerk in the city but reverted to his old order of manners, clothing, headgear. The mullahs were up again. The old religious formalities returned, the old superstitions and beliefs returned, with double their force, overnight.

Then the King dashed out of the ruined Palace, hurried wife and children into the waiting machine, and was shot up in the air, above the city which he had tried to modernise and had reduced to smoking ruin.

One more order he made in those last minutes before he left Kabul for ever. Again with a touch of irony, he appointed the next King of Afghanistan. His eyes must have roved round the little company of his friends, seeking a figure who might prove more acceptable to the people. His eye lit upon his fat, contented-looking, elder brother.

“Inayatullah will be King,” he said.

And perhaps he chuckled at the joke, as he had always chuckled at his brother's troubles.

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Those who followed closely events in Afghanistan will always discuss the important point of what part Sir Francis Humphrys played in the departure of Amanullah from Kabul. Newspapers representing every viewpoint of the political side of the affair, all had their own

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opinions. It was vigorously denied in diplomatic circles that the British Minister took any part in domestic politics in Afghanistan, but it may perhaps be reasoned that for the swift settlement of affairs with as little trouble as possible, Sir Francis did to some extent facilitate the exit of Amanullah unimpeded and without personal danger.

He was known to have some influence both on Amanullah and on Bacha Sachao, the man who alone could control the unruly mob in Kabul. Unless Sir Francis exercised this influence, it is difficult to understand why the fanatical Afghan mob, rabid and dangerous against those with even the slightest connection with the King, did not answer the appeals of the mullahs to wreak the last vengeance on Amanullah.

It was a "mullahs' revolution" to a large extent. Amanullah had been the greatest oppressor they had experienced, possibly in all Afghan history. The mullahs had stirred up the people not only in Kabul but in the countryside. They played on the strong but dormant religious feelings of the mob to such an extent that on that night they were willing to go to the last extremity to avenge their wrongs. Eye-witnesses state that on their lips were religious cries, not complaints against the burdens of taxation.

It is therefore highly possible that, purely with the interests of the country at heart, Sir Francis "interfered" to the extent of persuading Bacha Sachao to give Amanullah safe exit, perhaps without letting his unruly supporters into the secret. At any rate, as will be shown later, when Bacha Sachao eventually came to his horrible death in Kabul, some of the allegations made against him by his former followers were to the effect that he had connived at the escape both of Amanullah and Inayatullah.

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Whatever the truth, the fact of aiding Amanullah out of the besieged Palace would reflect nothing but credit on Sir Francis. His departure was all that was needed to restore peace temporarily, and to relieve the danger to the British Legation, situated in such a critical position in the line of fire between two opposing forces.

The transfer of power from the hated Amanullah to his brother, however, could not be expected to assuage the still rising tempest of anger against the new régime. Matters had gone too far for that. Inayatullah was known as a weak man who would not be likely to be too afflicted with the reforming mania of his brother. It might well be expected that the country would return to the original status of slovenliness and backwardness that suited so well the mullahs. But once begun, there was no stopping the bands of armed and desperate men who swarmed into Kabul.

They had had a taste of power. A howl of rage rose when it was realised that their prey had escaped. So far as they knew, there would be no great change now that the weak elder brother was in charge at the Palace. But what with the feasting and the revelry, the generosity of the frightened shopkeepers, and the freedom with which the mob could loot and pillage the rich granaries and storehouses, there was little ambition to proceed further with the "cleaning-up" campaign.

High spirits there were in Kabul during the next four days. There was no law, no order, save the old one of might being right.

These were heroes fighting for their faith. So said the mullahs, always in the rearguard, pressing their point with many a telling phrase likely to impress the ignorant hillmen. Indeed, the religious grounds for this barbarous campaign must have been utilised to the

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full during the few days' cessation from hostilities following the departure of Amanullah.

Bacha Sachao, bold and bad, was away in the hills after his first fly-by-night visit to Kabul. It was said that he had seven-league-boots, this fabulous figure, and could cover the mountains in half the time taken by an ordinary man. He scoured the mountain villages for recruits to his cause. He was ruthless, taking no refusal of his demands, and promising huge rewards for converts to his cause.

Then he came back to Kabul, at the head of a yet more rascally and numerous band of hillmen. The hours of Inayatullah were numbered. And it is probably only through Bacha Sachao's absence on a new recruiting tour that the five-day King of Afghanistan stayed so long on his precarious throne.

So far as is known, Inayatullah issued no orders. There were no meetings of the ruling council of Kabul. No sound or intimation of the wish to rule came from the wrecked Palace. Inayatullah, fearing for his life, crouched in the shelter of the ruined walls and waited for his end.

His name was a jest on the lips of the people. Many a joke was made about him. His unprepossessing figure and his well-known laziness provided many a background for the crude Afghan wit in those days of carousal and licence.

"Ho, the King!" they would laugh. "Inayatullah the Fat!" First he was pushed *off* the throne, when Amanullah seized the Treasury, and then he was pushed *on* the throne when Amanullah seized his freedom. Ho, what a King we have in Kabul now!"

Bacha was here. His name travelled round the crowded bazaar, and hurried the carousers out of the drinking shops. The leader was come to Kabul, no

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doubt to seize the throne ! For was he not right, this leader of the hillmen, when he promised victory in a few hours, riches for all, and a restoration of free religion for the righteous Afghan ? And they lined the streets and cheered when he rode by, the conqueror, on his lean mountain pony, swaggering and swashbuckling, revelling in the terrible physical ugliness that marked him from his fellows.

What if he was the son of a water-carrier ? What if he was unclean in the sight of God ? He was a fighter, and he had expelled an impious King.

But he did not march to the Palace and demand the body of the five-day King. He did not give to the people the second-best vengeance that they could wreak on the family of their hated ruler. There were no Royal executions in the streets, and the more blood-thirsty, who had been licking their lips in anticipation of seeing yet another crucifixion, were dismayed when he turned aside and had conference with the leading men in his small but efficient war council.

And during that day the second prospective victim of the Afghan mob flitted from Kabul.

The great bombing 'plane, this time with the British circles on its wings, landed near the British Legation. There was little time to lose, for Bacha Sachao would have difficulty in preventing his hordes from pouncing on the body of their prey.

Seven men, seven women, and eight children stole out of the Palace. They were hustled into the machine. There were none to see them go. And the engines roared as the 'plane lifted and set its nose to the south.

But if he let him escape, Bacha Sachao did not intend to allow Inayatullah far out of his sight. He was in a position to make terms after conceding to him the right to flee from the throne.

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“He must stay in Afghanistan,” said Bacha. “I will not have him in India, where Allah knows what mischief he would brew against the new order in Kabul.”

British pilots, consulted in Peshawar, did not relish the cross-country journey from Kabul direct to Kandahar. It was winter, and the wild country between the two cities offered no chance of a safe landing in the event of accident. The distance was only four hundred miles, but there could be no risks taken with a burden that was diplomatically precious.

Thus it was that the frightened little party, still suffering from the five-day tension during which they had nominally been the ruling family in a shattered Palace, were flown the two hundred miles to British India, disembarked at Peshawar, and hurried into a special train which was to make the long two thousand miles' circuit before the Afghan Frontier was reached once more from the Baluchistan side.

There had been no preparations for the flight. The arrangement to give them safe exit came as a complete surprise to Inayatullah. He was not consulted. He was not asked if he wished to leave. In all his life, nobody had ever consulted Inayatullah, the fat Prince, as to his intentions. Now he had been puppet-King, and not even then had anybody consulted him. But he went.

He was going to join his brother, to lean on the stronger will, and play second fiddle to more schemes intended to displace the usurper. He would make no decisions. He would be received with disappointment in Kandahar, where presumably Amanullah had been hoping that the throne would be at least nominally held while he judged the temper and strength of his supporters in another and usually loyal region.

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Amanullah himself had not been idle. Bombastic and hopeful bulletins had been issued among the tribesmen around Kandahar.

“Help me to throw out this usurper!” he had appealed. “Afghans cannot be governed by the son of a water-carrier. This is a brigand that presumes to the throne. He is unclean in the sight of Allah. Do not forget that by Royal Decree I have already rescinded all the orders to which you objected.”

But it was no good. Might was right again in Afghanistan, as it has always been. Bacha Sachao was ruling, with the rifle and the torturing brand, in Kabul, and there would be few who would venture to resist the savagery of his men. He still lived on his reputation as the Robin Hood of the hills. He emphasised his right, as a man of the hills, to rule. He laid stress on his primitiveness, and bade his men forget the heretical lessons of the Western world which had been brought for them into Kabul.

The true nature of Inayatullah showed itself in Peshawar. Waiting for arrangements to be made for his special train, he sat gloomily in a room in the small local hotel. He shunned sightseers, and covered his face when he was forced to leave the shelter of the room. At the last minute he expressed the wish to stay in India. He had had enough kingship. He was tired of intrigue. Being a King had nearly cost him his life. He was happy in peace and comfort. Such things as ruling and the “divine right of kings” were not for a man of his build and temperament.

But the agreement must be kept. Safe passage had been given him only on condition that he returned to Afghanistan and joined his brother at Kandahar. The British authorities meant to see that he was kept to his word. The amazing contract, between Great

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Britain and the son of a water-carrier of the Afghan hills, was kept to the letter.

“You have my word that he will be allowed to escape,” Bacha Sachao had said.

“You have our word that he will be returned to Kandahar,” had replied the British Government.

Both were honoured.

So the train ran south through the night. This was the favoured land through which a King was travelling. This was the land towards which every Afghan, king and commoner, had at some time or another turned his eyes. A rich land, prosperous and charitable. How different from the grim hills !

At the infrequent stops, armed guards tumbled out with fixed bayonets on the platforms and stood at attention. Police had shut the stations. The greatest secrecy surrounded the passage of that tragic train. Every signal was set in its favour. Every official knew of its passing, but it was seldom seen.

Six hundred miles to the south, it crept into Lahore at four o'clock in the morning. The station was shut. The lights were out. The guards clattered out to their posts.

But down the end of the train, there could have been seen a solitary figure opening a carriage door and softly shutting it as the train moved off.

I lay low and slept the few remaining hours of darkness on the mystery train.

CHAPTER XV

A BANDIT AS AMIR—RULE BY PERSECUTION—TWO AFGHANS
IN AN HOTEL—THE LAST BRITON LEAVES KABUL

THE train rolled on through the night, across the bare and inhospitable desert into the dawn. The grinding of the brakes woke me, and I tumbled out on to a small wayside platform. The guards were at their positions, bayonets fixed. The servants of the British officers in charge of the train wandered about the little station. Further along, a stout, unhappy individual stood talking to an English civilian. It was Inayatullah.

Nobody knew who I was. The English Chief of Police came up and asked me. I told him, and watched the expressions of amazement, then anger, chase across his face.

"You can throw me out here if you like," I said. "But it is such an out-of-the-way sort of place. . . ."

"How about some breakfast?" he invited. We went down the train to the refreshment car.

Next to me at table was a young, slim, Afghan prince. He spoke perfect English. We talked of the cold morning, the coming hot weather, the food. We talked of anything but this strange journey.

"Were you at Oxford?" he asked. "Do you know the Cherwell? When I was there, they stopped the playing of gramophones on the Cherwell at night. I thought it was very wise, for it is such a beautiful stream. . . ."

Inayatullah did not come to breakfast. He was, I

learnt, too despondent to eat. He was going to meet the anger of his brother, always feared, and he was not yet certain of the reception he would get from the loyal people of Kandahar.

The police chief and the young Indian Civil Service official came to talk.

"You are not allowed on this train," they said.

"I thought not."

"There will be a lovely row," they said.

"I suspected it."

"We shall see at Quetta."

So we ran on through the day and the evening. The train toiled up the long hills towards the snow-capped peaks of the mountains. We were in Baluchistan now. The end of the strange journey was near. At every stop, there was a little company of people off the platforms, informed of the arrival of Inayatullah by the bazaar gossip that flits from village to village and along the railway lines of the East, faster than the trains.

Then, in the dawn, we had pulled into Quetta station, clean and cold and orderly, and two English officials came into my carriage and blustered me out of it.

"There will be a row about this," they said.

"So there ought to be," I replied.

But in my pocket, ready typed in the train, there rested a message describing the curious events which led up to this curious journey.

I watched the train pull out of Quetta station towards the little Frontier halt of Chaman, once beflagged and decorated for Amanullah on his triumphant start to the European trip, now bare and inhospitable.

The British officials conducted Inayatullah from the train. Shepherded the women and children along the platform. Hurried them into waiting motor cars. Some of the women were waiting. Inayatullah wore the sad

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face of resignation, the face of the man who had been King in spite of himself.

The cars drove down the dusty uneven road and stopped at the Frontier barrier. There was a happy smile on the face of the young Afghan Prince who had talked to me about the Cherwell. He dreamed of the spires of Oxford. He was going back to the land of uncertainty and chaos. The little party walked across the Frontier, and to another group of cars awaiting them.

The women were bundled in. One of the children was crying. One of the party waved a hand. It was a farewell to the old régime.

Then the cars started for Kandahar, without a cheer and without a sign of excitement.

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The promised row was a good one while it lasted. It kept various Government departments busy on the telephone for a while, and entertained the anti-British newspapers hugely. One of them, an old enemy of mine, suggested plaintively that the Government had favoured a British journalist to the exclusion of his Indian brethren. We denied that.

Then it suggested that I had travelled in the lavatory of the train for two nights and a day. We denied that.

It excelled itself by saying that I had swung for two nights and a day in a net slung underneath one of the carriages. We denied that.

Then Government, also slightly hysterical owing to the allegations of favouritism, issued a *communiqué*. In it was expressed the sorrow and shame of the Indian Government that "Mr. Wild had behaved in a manner unbecoming that of a gentleman."

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This latter was one of the richest jokes against officialdom told in the Clubs for months past.

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News was already coming from Kabul. The water-carrier's son had not wasted his time. The empty Palace and the Arg were soon occupied. The irregular troops swooped down on it, chagrined at finding themselves robbed of their prey. They ransacked the rooms, tore the Western furniture and fittings to pieces, and encamped themselves in the rooms that had been the last refuge of Amanullah and his women.

First objective of their disappointed revenge were the Russian pilots. There was no resistance. The Russians had perhaps imagined that their foreign nationality would protect them from danger. They were wrong.

Terrible tales were told of the revenge on them for their efficiency and marksmanship with bombs from their machines. Bacha Sachao, it was said, had boasted that he would not touch a hair of their heads. No Afghan should commit the crime of assaulting an alien in all Afghanistan. The pilots were told this, standing before a tribunal held in public. We can imagine their proud, confident looks. We can imagine them in their splendid uniforms, their long legs stuck into high, decorative Afghan boots, standing before the new ruler of Kabul.

Bacha Sachao must have enjoyed himself. He was known as an expert creator of ingenious punishments. He was in his element.

"You will not be molested," he said. "We Afghans cannot hurt a foreigner. Indeed, you shall go back to your country. None shall detain you. Now go. . . ."

Stupefied, the little band of hired soldiers left the council of war. They met sullen looks and an ominous

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silence. "Go on," said the crowds. "Go back to Russia."

A little party offered to accompany them and show them the way. "The road lies over there," they said, and pointed to the snow-capped mountains of the north.

They began marching, still bewildered, to the north.

So the stories run. They say that the Russians marched and marched, watched by a relay of hillmen who were told of the orders from the new ruler in Kabul. When one set of guides failed through exhaustion, another party was ready. The villagers, obeying the orders of the water-carrier's son, gladly took on their spell of accompanying the Russians. They marched on and on.

They were never molested. They were never touched nor beaten. But on the other hand, they were given no rest, nor food, nor water. They marched till they dropped to die in the snow, of cold and fatigue and starvation.

So, at any rate, ran the gossip of the travellers in the street of wagging tongues in Peshawar. The tale was embellished and improved as it travelled. Every traveller had new details. Every rogue who slipped past the guards at the Frontier, and came for a night or so to the Paris of the East, had a new version of the words used by Bacha Sachao when he perpetrated this subtle lark on the men who had shed slaughter from the air at the command of the infidel King.

A few days later, on the 17th of January, the water-carrier's son proclaimed himself Amir. He took as title Habibullah Ghazi, Beloved of God and Defender of the Faith. His brute face must have been contorted with mirth at the sound of the last phrase.

For days after that, Kabul was a grisly city of the dead

and the dying. No sooner were the crucifixes cleared of their dread burdens, than other victims were borne aloft. There were impalings, and the heads of the wicked once again adorned the walls of the city. Mr. Isaacson, telling me later of the scenes in Kabul in those days just after the accession of Bacha Sachao, told me that he grew accustomed to the smell of burning flesh, and the sight of gory heads being carried down the streets on bayonets. Even the medieval tortures were revived for the satiation of that general lust for revenge. Men were boiled in oil. Kabul had indeed gone back to the Dark Ages.

The Afghan girl students were recalled from Turkey, whither they had travelled for the education of their minds. I had cause to remember them well, for I had written the caption for a picture of them which was distributed to the Press of India. It was a good picture. It was intended as propaganda for Amanullah's régime. In it, the girls were shown standing at a railway station, dressed in skirts and unveiled, with modern hats on their pretty heads.

I wrote something to the effect that they were going to Constantinople for their education, and while there would doubtless learn the art of the lipstick and the powder-puff.

The triviality was true, for Afghan girls, led by their Queen, had already begun the practice of gilding the lily, but that did not prevent my old newspaper enemy indulging in a violent attack on my morals, mentioning me by name in a leading article, as obviously I had meant to imply that the girls were being sent to Constantinople to learn prostitution !

We replied with the succinct remark that it seemed a long journey to take to learn a lesson easy enough for those inclined that way. . . .



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The girls came back, the foreign officers left Kabul, the guns rusted and rotted in neglect, the motor cars in the Royal garages developed premature old age. Ram Prasad, my old friend, had been found one morning with a neat slit in his throat. There were no more European hats in Kabul. The band no longer played the National Anthem, and the gardens of Paghman went to seed. The first railway in Afghanistan never carried a railway train. The dream city never throbbed to the movement of traffic. The old traders came back to their haunts in Kabul City. Kabul was finished with the frivolities of life. In a little while there was not a trace of the old régime. The as-you-were movement had been completed.

The mullahs were well pleased. They were given to understand that in return for their continued support of the new Amir, they would be allowed to regain all their old prestige. The old polygamy laws were reinstated, and the old game of graft came back, though in this disorderly world there seemed less opportunity for the astute officials to levy their petty fines on the public.

Strangely enough, it seemed that the whole country, save a group surrounding the immediate neighbourhood of Kandahar, was loyal to Bacha Sachao. The tribesmen of the south no doubt felt that in future they would be free to arrange their own affairs, and would incidentally suffer no more from the interference of police and State troops when they decided to make sudden attack on rich caravan or wealthy Hindu traveller. They had got what they wanted.

A small and compact Council of State was appointed, and without bothering their heads with such trivial details as sanitation or police, it was decided what should be done with malingerers and consistent evil-

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doers. The Council, in fact, formed schemes for the protection of the Amir against the next pretender to the throne, and otherwise considered that the best policy was to leave the Afghans to work out their own salvation, and to arrange their own justice. It was a wise move.

Bacha Sachao felt little apprehension of an attack coming from Amanullah. It was true that he could still command a large district near Kandahar. He still held prestige among the more educated and wealthy members of the community in that part of the country. But Bacha Sachao judged rightly that they would not follow him into war, and he on his side did not intend to make any further inroads on the security of the former King.

As a fact, Amanullah, pride recovering a little from the blow, had tried desperately to enlist the support of the loyal people of Kandahar, who liked him and honoured his right to reign. He was, of course, up against the mullahs even here, but by one spectacular deed, really typical of him, he was able to overthrow the prejudice of the people even in face of the mullahs' disapproval.

"Kafir!" the mullahs had called him, and the people had believed their argument that a man who could so fundamentally deny his religion by acts of transparent ungodliness, must indeed be ill-favoured of Allah.

"Kafir! He is an infidel!" cried the mullahs. "Look how he bid you forget the teachings of your religious masters! Consider how he gave good Afghan gold to the foreigners! Remember how his ungodly queen unveiled her face and broke the rules of *purdah* before a foreign people!"

The people shouted their dismay at such behaviour.

Then came Amanullah, with a trump card up his sleeve. He had been forewarned.

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“ You call me Kafir ! ” he retorted. “ I will show you that in fact I am favoured of Allah. Near Kandahar there is the cave of the Khirqua-i-Sharif, or holy cloak. It is written, as you know, that only a man close to God can open that cave. I will dare to open it ! ”

And he did. It is unknown whether the opening of the cave was any particular feat of strength, or whether legend had imbued it with a reverence and fear that kept it free from curious hands. The fact of its actual opening by Amanullah, however, is vouched for, and there can be little doubt that the superstitious Afghans who saw the feat actually imagined that he would be struck dead, or mortally afflicted, at the first touch.

“ I will dare to open it ! ” Amanullah had cried.

He silenced by that one move all the cries of infidel that greeted him. But even the honour of following a man so highly placed with Allah would not tempt the Kandaharis from their peaceful occupations. They would not trust him again.

There was yet another plot to place Asadullah Khan, a relative, on the Amir's throne, but here again lack of support, and an increasing lack of money, checked the scheme in its infancy. And day by day it seemed that Bacha Sachao was growing in power. Very soon it would be too late.

Equally futile were the efforts at a restoration of Amanullah's family taken by a cousin of his, one Ali Ahmed Jhan, once Governor of Kabul. I met him during a short visit to Peshawar soon after the accession of Bacha Sachao.

The little hotel at Peshawar does not lend itself to separation for the benefit of two opposing personalities, and yet by some miracle of tact it managed to house such a couple without undue friction. The two enemies

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were Ali Ahmed Jhan and Nadir Khan, late Commander-in-Chief of the Afghan Army, and now fresh from his French military training, a sick man, but a fine soldier.

The behaviour of these two in the hotel almost approached comedy. They lived in rooms at either end of the long verandah. They had meals in their own rooms. Once each day a big touring car drew up outside Nadir Khan's room, and he would go into Peshawar on some mysterious and lengthy business. Once every day Ali Ahmed Jhan took a walk in the garden. But he took care to do so while Nadir Khan was out.

The reason for their unfriendliness was simple. They were, in a sense, rivals. For one had but recently left Afghanistan with his bare life, and the other was preparing to enter the dangerous country once more—this time, however, to conduct a stern campaign which eventually led him right on to the throne, ousting the water-carrier's son for ever.

The story of Ali Ahmed Jhan is of very different calibre. I talked to him one day in his room, after having penetrated the strict guard which had been lent him by the British authorities. And, inside his room, I was astonished to find him in very jovial mood over a half-finished bottle of whiskey, which he drank neat and with considerable gusto.

The strict religious law prohibiting the Afghan any alcohol is usually observed, but it was the more surprising to find this ex-governor of the capital consuming a good Scotch brand with every evidence of expertness. He even asked me to have one—at nine o'clock in the morning.

It was only after our brisk and amusing conversation, however, that I learned that his epicurean taste had once already nearly cost him his life.

When revolution was at its height, and bands of

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pillaging outlaws overran the south, Ali Ahmed Jhan found himself at the head of a small force of loyal Government troops near Jallalabad. His men were convinced that their wisest course lay in remaining true to their oaths of allegiance, but they had begun to detect a growing strangeness in the behaviour of their leader. Then the dreadful news spread through the ranks. Ali Ahmed Jhan was usually intoxicated.

The leaders among the rank and file, greatly daring, suggested a deputation to put before him their sense of wrong and the insult they felt toward their religion. Such things could not continue. And a small band of stalwart men waited upon their leader one night in his tent, fully prepared to avenge the wrong done to Allah by the sacrifice of life if the accusation were proved to be true.

“ We have come to search,” they said briefly.

“ Search away, then,” said Ali Ahmed Jhan, with the drunkard’s bravado.

Under the mattress they found a little covey of bottles. Breaking the necks off, they smelt. It was alcohol, though of a strange smell.

Then the Afghan wit came into play. Ali Ahmed Jhan explained to his questioners, ready to kill him where he stood.

“ You do not understand,” he told them. “ You do not realise the breadth of the proposals for your own comfort and safety which have been made by His Majesty the King. You are ignorant men. Therefore you do not know, probably, the smell nor the appearance of the wonderful *feringhe* lotion which cures the sore backs of your camels. . . .”

And he showed the Afghan soldiery the labels on the the bottles, solemnly translating the maker’s name and address into instructions for the cure of camels.

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The excuse saved his life, but it did not satisfy the deputation, or the soldiers who heard the tale from them. They offered Ali Ahmed Jhan an ultimatum. He could stay and be killed, or fly. With a little more whiskey, he might have defied them, but that night he fled over the Border to Peshawar, where men had broader views about the proper use for the best Scotch.

One night, a month after I saw him, he finished the current bottle, and left once more for Afghanistan. But he had hiccupped his last. He found himself in the centre of a struggle that was no longer a drunkard's dream, discovered himself no longer to be the Strong Man of Kabul, and died a violent death before he had made many days' journey towards Kabul. A jovial rascal. I had enjoyed our little talk in the Peshawar hotel.

Nadir Khan, sober and soldierly, made no move for many months. He paced his room in Peshawar until well into the hot weather, waiting for the snow to clear from the passes. He was an impressive man, and an old campaigner. He it was who had crossed the Frontier on that innocent journey to see a relative in 1919. The result had been the Second Afghan War. He combined then, and does still, the cunning of the Afghan with the learning of the West. But in these days, working behind the scenes in Peshawar bazaar, he was more Asiatic than otherwise.

The winter was a hard one. The passes were frozen well into the second month of the year, and all movement in the land over the Border was suspended until less danger was threatened by the elements.

In spite of the handicap, however, the aeroplanes were still going daily to Kabul bringing back their quota of refugees. The landing-ground at Peshawar was daily a busy scene. Then came the news that the last claimants to a place in a British machine had been

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brought down. There would be one more journey. In the last machine would be Sir Francis Humphrys.

On the 26th of February, a single bomber sped towards the hills for the last time. It was on the ground only a few moments. Sir Francis Humphrys, hearing its approach, ran to the roof of the Legation and hauled down the Union Jack. Folding it and tucking it under one arm, he took a last look round the Legation, home of his personal treasures as well as his happiest hours. Then, by one of those queer impulses which affect men at dramatic moments, he picked out of its shattered glass case a stuffed woodcock, tucked the incongruous bird under the other arm, and ran for the 'plane. He landed at Peshawar, a wreck of his former self, nerve-racked and ill, with the absurd bird still tightly clasped to his body.

He was the last of 586 souls safely flown from a besieged city with one single mishap, and that on the ground. The Air Force had brought off a feat that thrilled the world.

The great 'planes roared their way in echelon down to Delhi. Whole towns turned out at the beat of their engines in the sky. I saw them when, a day or two later, their wireless instruments were receiving in the air the congratulations of the King. Then they flew to Delhi, each pilot and navigator to be personally congratulated by the Viceroy of India.

I spoke to Sir Francis Humphrys the night he arrived once more on British soil. He was a weary man, proud but still sick at heart at the destruction of hopes as well as homes, that he had seen. He had, I think, really believed in the good intentions of the exile who was now licking his wounds in Kandahar. He had never crossed the border-line of diplomacy, but he had done his best in an indirect way to slow up the progress

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of that disastrous policy which Amanullah had brought back from Europe.

When the deluge broke Sir Francis Humphrys undoubtedly saved the Legation from a slaughter that would have brought British troops once more into action in Afghanistan, that would have repeated once again the history of the British in Kabul, and might well have changed the face of the East for future years. Perhaps the stuffed woodcock was a symbol as much as the Union Jack. For it was farce, it was humour, and it was anti-climax. And, in the darkest hour, it had been farce and humour which had saved the British Legation. How else could we describe that noble, vulgar, and effective speech made by Sir Francis from the walls to the tense mob below ?

With the British evacuated, interest dropped in Afghanistan. There was no news from Kandahar. Kabul was quiet again. Nadir Khan pursued his stately way and his mysterious business in Peshawar. The winter broke, and the green earth was seen again, the land freshened by the moisture of the snow. Very soon it would be burning hot, and the fair land would grow brown and dry. The spring lasted such a little time. The brooks were running fast, and old Kabul River, accustomed now to so many years of blood fouling its depths, ran swift and strong to the plains. The flanks of the hills were showing brown through their white mantles. Soon, only on the peaks of the Hindu Kush, far away, was there snow.

As the spring turned into summer, the little outpost of Chaman stirred again with news. Amanullah was coming down to India again. He was going, so they said, to Bombay, perhaps to Europe.

He was coming not with the cloak of splendour, to the beat of drums and the boom of the guns' salute, but

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furtively and without warning. No aeroplanes were to wheel overhead, looping and dipping in salute. There would be no red carpets, nor addresses of welcome or farewell. Amanullah was leaving his country for the last time.

He had given up the struggle.

CHAPTER XVI

A SAD PARTING—GOOD-BYE TO THE EAST—A CHALLENGE TO
THE AMIR—AT THE GATES OF KABUL—DEATH OF THE
BANDIT

AMANULLAH had made a wise decision. His confidence in the fighting spirit of the Kandaharis had not been justified. They were unwilling to follow him any more, and they certainly would not risk a trial of strength with the formidable Bacha Sachao.

He had undertaken several tours in the vicinity of Kandahar, and had succeeded in recruiting several thousand men to his side. His dynamic personality was still powerful enough then. He could still inspire a crowd with his own courageous example. The old fire was there; but fear of the present ruler predominated, and not even the appeal on religious grounds to rid their beloved country of this unholy usurper in Kabul could move the Kandaharis from their apathy. He had no money to bribe them with. He could promise peace and power and plenty to whomsoever would support him, but he had promised that before. . . .

There were other personal complications. He was no doubt urged by his relatives to go while the going was good. Bacha Sachao was not the type to leave unmolested a rival in the country. It was quite possible that he would eventually endeavour to rid Afghanistan once and for all of the ex-King.

Then, when the sad little party was making its way down to Bombay, in the baking heat of the early

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summer, it was noticed that Souriya was undertaking the terrible journey with an added burden. She was going to have a child, conceived in the throes of revolution and carried through the agonies of a hurried evacuation.

The journey down through the brown plains of India must have been a torment to her. The sun beat down that spring relentlessly and continuously. For two days and nights she gasped in pain. Then, safe in the cool rooms of the hotel in Bombay, she delivered her child.

Amanullah was even then impatient to be off. He paced the corridors of the hotel in impotent fury. He was seared by regrets and impatience. His pride stung him, and he wept silently at the contrast of his secret departure, an exile, and his former triumphant visit to Bombay.

Hardly had Souriya recovered sufficiently to leave her bed, when the little party embarked on an Italian boat and saw the East for the last time.

They had money, it is true. The Crown jewels, personal heirlooms, and a sum of money which varied with every report, had been smuggled out of the country. At one time he appeared destitute. At other times, he showed that he had considerable reserves. As the liner ploughed her way towards his exile, he mapped out his life anew, viewed ahead the quiet existence of a private citizen, and cast in the wake of the throbbing steamer the dreams of power and kingship.

Italy received him with tolerant and kindly hospitality. He retired into obscurity, humbled and unambitious, resurrected now and then as the central figure of rumours that there would be a revival of his régime, but leading a quiet life divorced from the former stress and strain of Eastern politics.

Before many days' residence in Rome, however, he had heard news from the East which must have caused him intense personal and patriotic satisfaction. Nadir Khan, recently Minister in Paris, had gone back. The news shook the East. The heroism of the man, fresh from a sick bed in Europe, thrilled every hearer. Instinctively, those who read of his sudden journey over the Frontier, prophesied that he was going to his death.

Nadir Khan was consumed with a fire of unquenchable patriotism that kept his frail body alive. He had been convalescing in Nice from a serious illness when he received the call to go back to his country. It was a spontaneous urge that sent him hurrying to the East, to the hotel where I saw him in Peshawar. When he joined his train at Nice, he staggered as he walked. He was sick unto death. Yet he held his fine body upright by magnificent will-power, and when he had conducted his mysterious business in Peshawar, he strode boldly across the Frontier, into the land savagely ruled by the arch-enemy of his former master.

None knew of his coming. He had counted on few supporters. He had no money, and it was only with difficulty that he was allowed through the Khyber. He was leading a forlorn hope. It was more than likely that bands of marauding tribesmen would cut him to pieces at sight if they recognised that here was a prominent ally of the late King. Yet he went with hope in his heart, and a great pride.

There was yet another factor, of merely personal importance to him, unconnected with the urge which made him undertake this crazy journey in pursuit of leadership once more. His wife and children were in Kabul Gaol, in the company of some fifty other women and children, captured during the victorious raid on the

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Royal Palace, and all believed to be the relatives of the King and Ministers at his Court.

Yet the miracle happened. As he passed into the interior, in March 1929, he was greeted and welcomed by companies of tribesmen. They hailed him affectionately, came up and kissed his hand. Even the Shinwaris, first to take up arms against the rule of Amanullah, welcomed him. They knew him for a fighting man and a true patriot. In the space of a week he had with him the support of thousands of men in the south, ready to march with him to Kabul, prepared to die for their leader.

His success put heart into him, revived his health as no European doctor had been able to do, and determined him to attempt the salvation of his country. In a few more weeks he marched to Kabul, captured the hill of Bala Hissar, and looked down once more on the capital which held his relatives in prison and which formed the headquarters of the shameful Amir.

Strangely enough, his words to his troops had been of the same substance as those of Amanullah. "Rid yourselves of this infidel usurper!" he had cried to them. "Save your country from the shame of a heathen ruler! Take arms with me, and win back the fair name of Afghanistan!"

In the one case the appeal had miserably failed. Now, with Nadir Khan as spokesman, the words turned the oppressed and retrograde tribesmen into crusaders fighting for their nation. For they could put their trust in him.

The water-carrier's son was worried. He had made few plans for the defence of Kabul. He had not put the Army to rights, and he had not been able to preserve the loyalty of his troops. It was every man for himself in Kabul in those days. Patriotism had gone. Bacha Sachao ruled by terrorism, and it was unlikely that he

would be able to persuade an army to take the field against the invader.

He tried trickery in its place.

Up to the heights of Bala Hissar, right up to the outposts of Nadir Khan's encampment, there came one day a messenger from Bacha Sachao. He came as envoy and peacemaker. He carried with him the assurance of his master that all was well in Kabul ; that the capital was peaceful and happy ; that there was no need to endanger the peace of the people with another battle. And, if there were any doubt in the mind of Nadir Khan as to the safety and comfort of the women and children, then Bacha could reassure him on this point also. They were cared for, and well looked after. See . . . here was a declaration signed by their own hands.

Nadir Khan took the paper and read it. It certified that his relatives were comfortable and happy. That they had food in plenty, and every wish was gratified. It was signed by a dozen hands.

The messenger, however, approached closer. He whispered to the invader. Might he, he asked, speak in private ?

They were alone. Taking his voluminous *puggaree* from his head, the man dipped his hand into the innermost fold. From there, he produced a tiny, screwed-up ball of dirty paper. Furtively, he gave it to Nadir Khan. It was a private message from his wife, and described, in terse, heartbroken words, the true state of the women and children imprisoned in Kabul.

" We are desperate," it read in effect. " Words cannot describe the miseries to which we are subjected. And when you attack, we will surely be murdered. We wish to tell you, however, that we desire you to avenge us, whatever be our fate. Wipe out the scourge of Afghanistan ! We will be sacrificed, but one and all, we urge you

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to proceed. The accompanying note was signed by us under compulsion."

Nadir Khan never hesitated, even when the attempt at placation made by Bacha Sachao was followed by a threat.

A further message reached him in his camp at Bala Hissar. "When you shell our fortifications," said Bacha, "the first of your shells will fall on your women and children."

That very night Nadir Khan gave the command. The captain of the artillery, which he had already captured and placed into position, was his own brother. There were but few guns, but from their commanding height they hoped to be able to force a surrender within a few hours, for the old fortress could not withstand for long a concentrated fire.

The next day was fixed for the beginning of the bombardment. At dawn, Nadir Khan's field-glasses swept the fortifications. There was fear in his heart, but once more his conscience urged him that whatever the cost, he must free his country of a tyrant.

In the front of the fortifications he saw movement. Sending a scout forward to investigate, his worst fears were confirmed. The figures, seen from the heights to be chained to the walls of Kabul, were his own relatives. The captain of the artillery knew that in front of him were three of his sisters, his wife, and his mother.

The first shell went screaming on Kabul, and the cannonade began, crumpling up the defences in a short time.

There was little fighting. The victorious, invading army swept in with few casualties after seven months' fighting. Bacha Sachao was of the type which attracts support while in the height of his power, but which can find few to stand faithful in the hour of need.

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And when the invaders marched down on Kabul, firing as they went ; when eventually they saw through the smoke of battle the exhausted and drooping figures chained to the walls, they found that not one of them had been touched. Some of those women are now in London. Some are still in the Court at Kabul. The little slip of paper scrawled with the few words of fine courage, offering their own lives for their country, is carefully preserved in London.

Nadir Khan had finished his job. He had accomplished what he set out to do, and was ready to retire.

“ You are free,” he told the Kabulis. “ I have rid you of this tyrant and usurper. You will manage your own affairs the better without him. And I will go back. Afghanistan has no longer need of me.”

But the people would have none of it. Even the Kabulis, by now tired of the rule of fear which had come to them with Bacha Sachao, pressed round the invader with praise and gratitude.

“ Stay ! ” they cried. “ Stay with us and, since you are a true Afghan, rule in Kabul in the way of former Amirs. For we trust a soldier such as you are.”

After which, turning to more important and pleasant affairs, they began to consider details of the means of death for Bacha Sachao.

He had surrendered only after a desperate struggle. To the last he had shown his old bravado and fearlessness. He knew this was the end. Yet never for a moment did he think of flying to the hills where he had always been outlaw, and which had always given him protection. Bacha Sachao stayed to satisfy the savage vengeance of both the invaders and the Kabulis whom he had victimised.

Reared in cruelty, little different from the beast, he had ruled with a ferocity unparalleled in history. He had



THE COMRADES OF THE BANDIT KING STONED TO DEATH AT KABUL



BACHA SACHAO AND HIS RELATIVES HANGED IN KABUL

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at first delighted the frenzied Kabulis by the ingenuity of the punishments inflicted on all who had done them wrong in the past. His black heart revelled in a display of inhuman delight in suffering. At the time, nothing could have better pleased his people.

When, however, it began to be realised that his greed for the sight of human suffering could not be satisfied, the Kabulis regretted their first admiration. His imprisonment of the women and children connected with the former Court was no doubt justified in their eyes, but they began to learn that his was a veritable love of cruelty not to be limited to those deserving punishment.

He had ruled ferociously, and ferociously did he die. When they came to him, chained and beaten in the prison of the Palace, he guessed his end. Nobody can tell the order of his sufferings, and how long he lived, but it is certain that before the mangled remnants of his body were swept down by the swift Kabul River, he had been beaten, crucified, stoned, shot, and hanged and quartered.

The picture of him on the crucifix, still living, was later hawked round the Peshawar bazaar, and the inquisitive were charged eight annas a look. He was still living when, after being cut down from his exposure in the public streets of Kabul, he was once more beaten and eventually shot like a thief.

Kabul was remembering those months of tyranny, when the sight of men hanging in the street was not uncommon. Bacha Sachao, once the romantic Robin Hood of the hills, died dishonoured and unmourned, though the tales told in the Peshawar whispering-gallery mentioned that he never flinched, never pleaded with his torturers, and at the end had a bawdy joke and a taunt on his writhing lips.

But Nadir Khan, praising Allah and rejoicing in the blessing that he had been able to bring to Kabul, was

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powerless to prevent the vengeance of the mob, and set about creating order out of chaos.

At the age of forty-four, he was embarking on a task that might well have daunted a greater adventurer. A sick man, he had seen vanish all his ideals, all his ambitions. Though he was one to counsel caution to his King, loyalty had driven him to support every move made by Amanullah. He may have sensed danger ; he certainly knew the folly of forcing methods on the Afghan mind ; yet, having voiced his protest, he had set himself, to the best of his ability, to implement the policy of his King. He forgave Amanullah all his faults, for Amanullah was a man after his own heart, a brave man and strong.

Now he found himself in circumstances more favourable than ever had come to Amanullah. If he liked, he could pursue a policy of inaction, with perfect agreement from most of his countrymen, and comparatively beneficial results. He could allow his country to lapse into the bad old ways, that, even so, were not so bad as the new. He could sit in Kabul supreme, fearing no invader, relying on his reversals of Amanullah's policy to keep him in the popularity so casually won.

It says much for his character that he did not. He soon let it be known that though the old régime was over, nevertheless he would insist on a rigid though cautious advance and a gradual elimination of the plague of corruption. He did not act at once. There was enough to do in the return to normality. There were evils enough to be eradicated before reconstruction could be begun. And for many months hardly a word came from Afghanistan. On the surface, at any rate, there was peace. There were a few rumours of warfare and uprisings. There were some expeditions from Kabul, led by the warrior King, and some tribes who thought once

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more to gain by general defiance of the Government, learnt for the first time that they could no longer continue their once-profitable occupation of loot and plunder on neighbouring villages.

Most important of all, the priests regained their position. It may be that Nadir Khan himself did not approve of their old methods of wielding power over the people. It may be that he saw the evils of the régime of the Church. But the mullahs were too strong. With the coming of revolution, they had crept back to their old strongholds. They had been foremost in urging the people on to violent protest against the reforms. They had been able to point to the downfall of Amanullah as if it had been their own personal triumph. The old fear and superstition still persisted in the hearts of many of their followers, and before the country-people knew where they were, they found themselves once more under the yoke of the mullahs. Nadir Khan was too wise a man to protest at the beginning, and, once back in office, the reverend gentlemen would have taken a deal of shifting.

The mullahs, then, came back. It is an old truism that when you take an influence away from a childish people, you must replace it. Looked on in that light, Amanullah's wholesale repression of the priests cannot be defended. He gave the people nothing in place of their traditional overlords. Nadir Khan could not yet give them any reality of Government. He was there more or less on sufferance. And so he allowed the mullahs to regain their old pre-eminence in every village, in every department of national life. "As you were!" had been the order once more.

At first, indeed, this was a Government of marking time. The Army, which must always come first in importance in the country, was half organised and consisted only of those who did not care to desert. It was

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essential to deal with this problem first, and it was imperative to settle the matter on the proper footing before security of tenancy for the new Amir could be guaranteed. There were still bandits and opportunists in plenty who might imitate the example of Bacha Sachao. For the time being, Nadir Khan had little organised protection against another such invasion, though he could rely on the loyalty, for what it was worth, of the Kabulis.

For his own sake, he made no mention of the rebuilding of Kabul, the erection of Darulaman, the building of roads, or indeed the modernisation of any traditional practices. It was enough to promise a relaxation of the grinding taxation. This was his first step, and though for some time past not a penny had been paid to the tax collectors, except by those simple souls who paid out of fear for the officials, the proclamation announcing this step to the countryside was well received.

Of course, it must be appreciated that in Afghanistan there is no method of reaching the ears of even the minority of the population with a message or a command. It took more than a year for the people of the countryside to appreciate the disastrous policy decided on by Amanullah. Even then, all they knew about the new régime was that the local tax collector, representing Government, pressed his demands on them harder and harder.

Nadir Khan had virtually no newspapers in which to announce his ideals and his promises. He could send no envoys to the scattered hamlets to announce by word of mouth, to ten million people, the benefits that might accrue to them through lawfulness and loyalty. He did not even know their number, for the Afghans have never been enumerated, though the figure of ten millions is considered the nearest that can be guessed at.

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If news were to be officially circulated, its inferences and its details were at the mercy of possibly dishonest local officials. News was, furthermore, subject to the approval of the priests. We can indeed picture the scene in the village square or main street, when the carrier of news arrives with his message. He is weary and footsore. He is the natural prey of the hospitable gossips of the village. He must impart to them first the portent of his news, request them to summon those of the villagers who are willing to hear his voice, and he must be content with the sparse crowd that collects round him when he is ready to begin.

The drum, a rough skin stretched over a more or less circular wooden rim, is beaten monotonously at sundown. The curious get up from their doorways, anxious for news from the great and wicked capital. Why, the last messenger came in the depths of winter, when the snow was thick in the passes, and it seemed as if the winter nights would never end, never relent in their severity. Now it is summer, and the sun blazes down, fiercely and as remorselessly as the frost gripped them. What news? What news?

It is the old cry. For all these months they had existed on the tales of travellers, the picturesque fables of those who had come into the village for trading. They had heard again the old folk tales from the mouths of the priests. They had listened to expansive liars and romancing guests who thought to repay hospitality by the glibness of their tongues.

The time comes for the need of authenticity, even among people who have lived their lifetimes on legend and rumour. If there is need for a parallel, you may see it every day in the streets of London. "Official," add the newspaper placards to a terse piece of news, though for days past the same sheets have been averring

the same facts with only their own reputations to back them up. . . .

So the Afghan hillmen and villagers swarm round the drum-beats, waiting for the voice of the Government news-teller. They are waiting for something "official."

Thus did Nadir Khan's proclamations and promises go out to his people. They were garbled, mangled, altered to suit individual tastes and prejudices. They were whispered in the wine-shops, and shouted in the face of a winter wind from shepherd to mountain hunter. They flickered across a white and glistening world. The words, or something like them, penetrated into the dark and squalid huts, crossed the passes, were heard in the frail shelters holding man and beast from the bitterness of that winter. But it was hit-or-miss. Nadir Khan was working in the dark. He could never judge the strength of his own personality in his own country.

But one fact took root. The mullahs were back. There was no need further to question the policy of Nadir Khan. Afghanistan had gone back to the old order. A sigh of relief was offered from all the boundaries of Afghanistan. This was better than enforced progress and the mutilation of religious beliefs. From the moment that Nadir Khan had impressed that point, he had won the battle for his own country.

The peasant dropped back into content and peace. All was for the best. According to his lights, he reviewed with some satisfaction the events of the past few years. Bacha Sachao, the despised despot, had gone. Only after his terrible end was it revealed in the villages that he was a Tajik, one of a tribe never considered by the Afghans ("Children of Israel") to be of equal rank. That reason for his fall was only given after his death, for he had always stoutly maintained his right to be included in the higher ranks of the Afghan

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peoples. Docile and cringing, the Tajiks play but a small part in the history of their country, and only occasionally rise to the level of their enemies, the Hazaras and the Turkis, to be united against a common invader.

It seemed now that for the first time in a hundred years of Durrani rulers, there might be peace among the tribes. The nomad Afghans, comprising the greater part of the population, travelled peacefully to pastures they considered to be the best. Untroubled by the former burden of taxation, they drove their cattle across the now darkening plains, hitched their ploughs, mere rough trivets of sticks with an iron tip, to the carrying-yoke for easier transport, gave the 16-inch sickle to sons to carry, and set off confidently for the lower pastures.

He has no home, this wanderer. He lives in precisely the same manner as his forefathers of two thousand years ago. He understands not, nor wants, the permanent boon of canals and costly irrigation schemes. He is prepared to struggle with the unyielding earth for as long as he has strength. He wants no modern methods. He pits his strength against an old enemy. And, if the season be too hard for him to bear, if the rains fail him and the crops wither under his desperate care ; if the torrents from the mountains sweep away his possessions in the spring-time, or the cruel neighbour pounce on him when he is unprepared for unwelcome visitors ; if these misfortunes crowd upon his undeserving head, he is still content.

“Insh’Allah,” he whispers, and takes cattle, farm implements, bed, bedding, wives, children, and his own prejudices to another and fairer valley. At any rate, under the new rule of Nadir Khan, he could not blame the Government. For the Government had left him strictly alone.

CHAPTER XVII

NADIR SHAH'S RECORD—TWO YEARS OF PROGRESS—RELIGION AND EMANCIPATION—RULE BY POPULARITY

MEET an Afghan and you meet a fervid patriot. Talk to an Afghan, and sooner or later he will tell you about his native country ; about the wide sweep of the plains ; about the towering, impressive hills ; even about the cruelty of the summer sun and the biting cold of winter. But he will remember only the refreshment of a cool shaded patch under the trees at the end of a journey through the dust, when evening comes, or the welcome of a great wide hearth after the bitterness of the bare hills in winter.

The expatriate Afghan is seldom at ease. He makes a poor exile. As he talks to you, the big sensitive eyes will gleam with the fervour of the man talking about his own land, the long thin delicate hands will spread themselves eloquently, and gesticulate freely. He will be all fire one moment, all sadness the next. And, sooner or later, he will talk about the new King.

Nadir Khan, now named Mahomed Nadir Shah in salute to his kingly rank, is talked of by the exile Afghans as the saviour of their country. He is the idol of the Eastern mind. He combines all the qualities of the strong and brave hunter with the diplomatic skill of the Westerner. He speaks five languages. He is the wise man of the East and the experienced man of the West. Never, in the opinion of the Afghan, has there been a man at the head of Afghanistan of a type to compare with King Nadir Shah.

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They point to two and a half years of patient, stolid work. They detail the improvements already to be seen in the country. And if ever there was a ruler who started at scratch, it was the present King of Afghanistan. When, bursting into stricken and satiated Kabul at the head of his troops in October of 1929, he eventually dragged the bandit king to his shame and his death, he searched the Treasury and the Palace rooms to find bareness and desolation. It was probably the first case in history of a national exchequer being unlined with even a silver coin. Robbers had left not a rupee. There was no bullion, no gold ornaments, no jewels, no State decorations, no deposit in valuable metal.

Literally, a man ruled in Kabul without the price of a meal for himself. There was little or no army. In any case, the soldiers could not be paid. There was no credit, and there was no cadre of officials ready to procure the means of carrying on. There was no system of issuing appeals, commands, or proclamations to the people. There were no police, and if there were some rifles, there was no ammunition.

Men were starving. The granaries were empty, and the grain fields had been neglected for a more richly promising harvest. The cold winter threatened to last for ever. Save for the undoubted fact that the Kabulis had had enough fighting and bloodshed to tide them over for many months, there was nothing to prevent a state of confusion and misery transcending everything that had passed before.

To appreciate the sum of Nadir Shah's achievement, it is necessary to compare this picture with the situation to-day. There is a Parliament, democratically and honestly conducted. There is a Senate, to be likened to an Upper House, and elected members of the people are permitted to speak for their own classes and pass

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their appropriate laws. Taxes are collected, regularly and systematically. There is a standing Army, well paid and well fed and equipped. There are new roads criss-crossing about the Southern Provinces. The drone of passenger and military aeroplanes can be heard overhead. Another dream of Amanullah is being realised, for work has started in the mines, and coal and other minerals are being brought to the surface, to be transported long miles to the frontiers.

Even the dream that was to take solid shape of stone is being translated into fact. Darulaman, still bearing the name in honour of its impractical creator, is rising slowly out of the desert. Darulaman, destined to be neglected and despised as the fantastic dream of an over-ambitious man, is to be built.

It is not quite the city of giant buildings and impressive squares and distances visualised in the mind of Amanullah. It has, at any rate, some relation with the needs of the moment, and the capabilities of the national exchequer. But it is called Darulaman, perhaps in ironic memory of the man in whose brain it grew as a wild idea of the Western world. The workmen are back at Darulaman, city of the future, and slowly the walls are rising.

Even the railway boasts its little train running between the old capital of blood-soaked history, and the new town. The train works, chugging between the two stations with its daily load of artisans. It has justified the hopes of its German planners, though they never stayed to see the wonder of the Afghan at the first "iron horse" in the country. Nadir Shah, the Westernised Afghan, has done that.

The telephone system has been retrieved from the wreckage and the ruin of revolution. The telegraphs have raised their chain of posts anew along the routes

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to the frontiers, and between the cities. The wireless station crackles, to the eventual glory of Signor Pierri, who never stayed in the wrack of internal warfare to see his precocious child in harness, but left, with an evil memory, for his beloved boulevards. He sees life in Rome, while the radio crackles to his elegant memory in the city that he hated above all others.

The gardens are tended once more, and the long vistas of Italy engineered by the foreign gardeners for the delight of Amanullah, now try to deny that they were for a time submerged by rushing feet, their blooms stifled by the smell of cordite, their elaborate order dimmed for the eyesight by the fumes from a hundred burning piles. In that fair valley nature heals and gives the lie to the realities of human greed and envy. The gardens bloom as ever they did in the false heyday of their youth, and every evening the paths between the orderly beds of flowers are used by the people of Kabul, taking the best time of the day for their leisure, laughing, playing, chattering.

On the silver screens of half a dozen cinemas there flit the most modern images of civilisation. To escape from the talkies, it is only necessary to go to Afghanistan, but the silent pictures are there, and the thrilled public watches twice nightly a succession of carefully chosen films with a high moral purpose, showing the Afghan warrior about his peaceful and happy occupations, the Afghan peasant cultivating his fields in the modern and Government-approved fashion, and the Afghan scholar assiduously bending his head to the mysteries of education.

All this in two years, starting from scratch. . . .

There must be something in this Nadir Shah, Westernised Afghan.

As vital as the positive reforms are the negative virtues

of his rule. Hardly a Paris hat or a German pair of shoes shows itself in Kabul city. The bazaar of the leather workers is humming with activity once more. The shoes of Kabul point up to heaven again, and are vastly more comfortable than the polished pointed toes effected for the imitation of a false European standard. Vastly more comfortable, too, are the worked brown and green sandals, for wear on the rough hill tracks, with a big toe protruding from where the two simple flaps are joined, and an ingeniously decorated red strap round the heel.

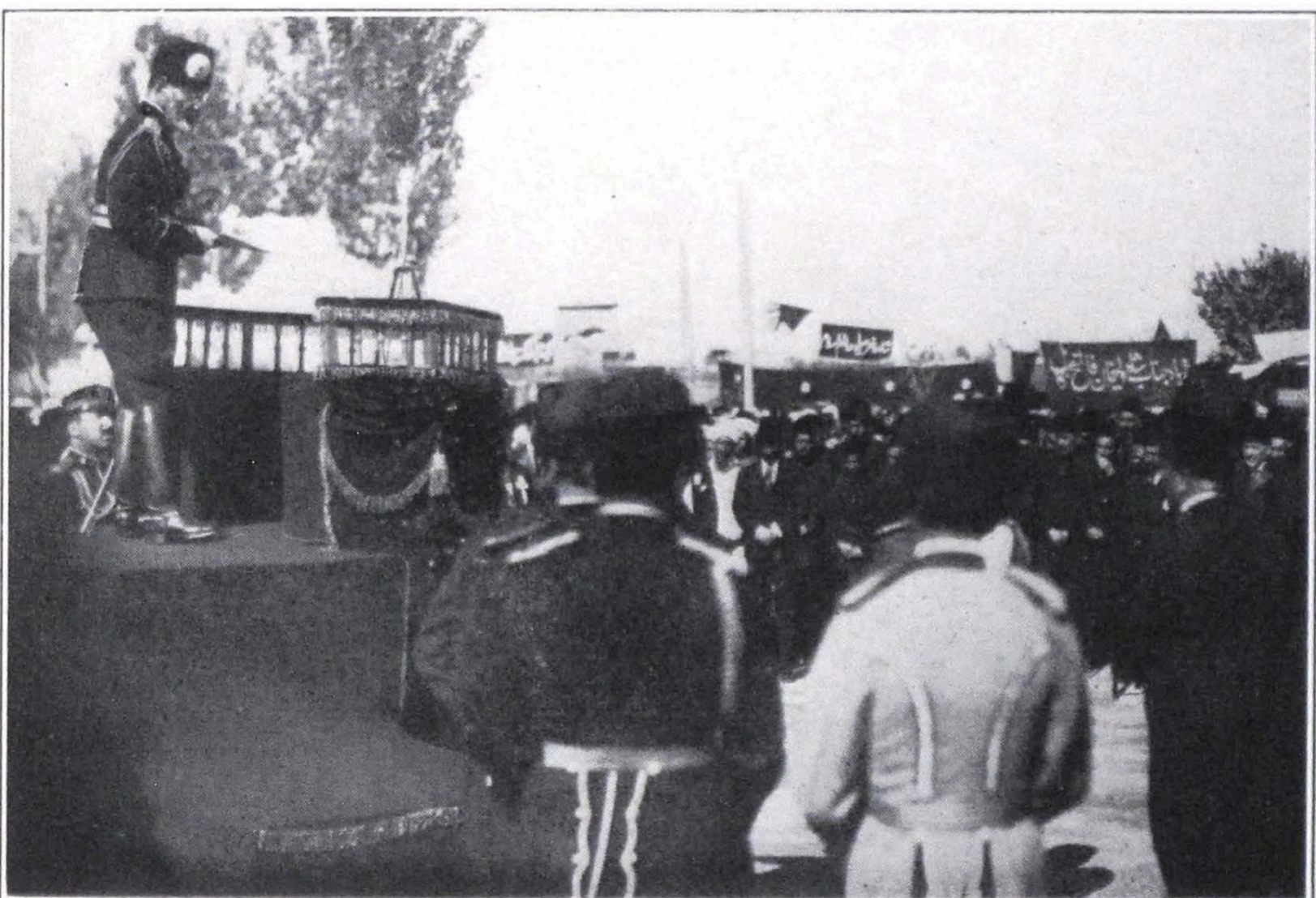
The *puggarees* perch jauntily or voluminously on the heads of the Afghan nation once again. The long flap hangs down the back, for its old use as face covering, dust covering, or pillow for a weary head. Waistcoats are gaudy and as loose as once they were tight and sombre under the Western order, and down to the bare ankles flow the swaggering folds of white trousers, billowing magnificently at the knee, pulled in at the shin-bone.

“Afghanistan for the Afghans !” The old cry, cloak for so many varied motives and reforms in these crowded years, seems to ring more genuinely while Kabul retains its character of the unchanging East. We see now, indeed, a vast change in the throng that moves through the gates of the city. No Russians shoulder their way through the bazaar in the uniform of the Air Force. No polyglot band of engineers or architects sits in the cafés. No secretariat of all the nations is housed in the great blocks of hostels, once echoing to the languages of all the world. Save for a few professors from Europe, Afghans run their own country.

In the oldest country, the motor car cannot be avoided. There are more motor cars in Afghanistan than ever before. Amanullah’s Rolls-Royces went the way of many treasures during those hectic days when the bon-fires burned so merrily, but there are six to take the place



KING NADIR SHAH DRIVES TO HIS CORONATION



KING NADIR SHAH'S CORONATION ADDRESS, OCTOBER 17, 1930

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of one in these days, and with the coming of the new roads the imports of cars are ever increasing.

The British Legation is patched up again, and there rules a Scotsman with a small staff for the representation of Great Britain. The dark days have nearly been forgotten, and English women are once more at the great white building. It seems a long time since the last 'plane flew from Kabul with the last Englishman in the cabin.

Outside the city, on the playing-fields, are to be heard the voices of those who are playing football and hockey and handball. Sport newest of all new things for the Afghan, has come to the country. Government lends a sympathetic ear to the directors of national sport. It was even hoped that this year Afghan hockey players would be at Los Angeles for the Olympic Games.

It is a free country once more. The old embargo is lifted again, and the old vindictive cry, that followed the anti-European protest, is heard no more. Passports are given for visitors to Kabul, and the land that was forbidden returns for the second time to freedom for the *feringhe*.

Nothing is heard of another Royal trip to Europe. Strangely enough, the fact of the King's European training arouses no resentment nor suspicion in the minds of the people. He has seen, and he has benefited by Europe. He gave up security and comfort to come back on a forlorn hope. He knows the West and he returned to the East. The philosophic Afghan reflects that there is here less danger than in a ruler who thought to tackle the West after he had sat on an Eastern throne.

Peace, and the gospel of content, has been suggested to the Afghan nation, for the first time, with success. No fire-eating idealist sits in Kabul and looks with envy across the frontiers of his own Kingdom. A country

bigger than France, and as sternly devoted to agriculture, now bends energies hitherto devoted to warfare to the development of the land. The Army aims its French and Italian and German rifles at parade-ground targets only for the better efficiency of internal security. Peace and Afghanistan! The words sound ill-mated. . . .

But it was a slim, well-educated and fervently patriotic Afghan in Europe who summed up for me the secret of the success of his hero. I had asked him about the relations between priest and King, and the progress of the old struggle, now transformed into co-operation, if report be true.

“There was never a reason,” he began intensely, “why religion and progress should disagree. Islam, one of the world’s greatest religions, does not constitutionally prohibit progress. The two can march side by side. They do so to-day. The King of Afghanistan is a religious man. He is fervently religious. He is known in his country as such, and it is known that he will not at any time compromise the tenets of the Islamic Faith. He has even incorporated the insignia of the pulpit in the national flag.

“He has, however, advanced emancipation according to Western ideas inside the wide boundaries of the Faith. There was, indeed, no reason for any progressive measure to conflict with religious principles. We have to-day the beginnings of every social reform dreamt of by Amanullah. Yet there has not yet been a single suggestion that a religious custom or principle has been endangered.

“What, indeed, has religion to do with social progress? The oldest religion can be consistently held by the most up-to-date and progressive nation. With the Afghan, the Faith comes before material and physical needs.

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But that is no reason why he should not move forward, even in the European manner, without shedding a single detail of his spiritual equipment.

“ Nothing like the foolish fetishes attempted in the past are to be attempted to-day. Why ape the sartorial and traditional conditions of the West ? Surely you may use a motor car, a wireless, or a telephone, without wearing a Cockney suit and hat ! Surely, to be clean-shaven is not a necessity of being modern ! Never again will there be a campaign to undermine the details of the Afghan religion. At any time, it would be synonymous with disaster.”

So the laws of the State followed the laws of Islam, and peace reigned in the valleys and in the hill-ranges that had seldom ceased in all history to echo to the clatter of warfare.

Slowly there percolated into even the remotest reaches of that barren land the strange news that at last there had come an Amir who intended to abide in peacefulness. There were no more ambitious glances towards the horizons outside the State. There were no more proud and longing glances at the army on the march, and even the ministers of the State were taught to live only for the interior peace of the country.

Proclamations and public announcements were made, all imbued with the same spirit. Though it could never be alleged that the Afghan had lost his pride of race, while men still marched about their business with rifles slung over their shoulders, and still gave a glance at a stranger that meant swift retribution for insult, nevertheless, the tone of the new Afghan Government was consistently calm and free of boasting.

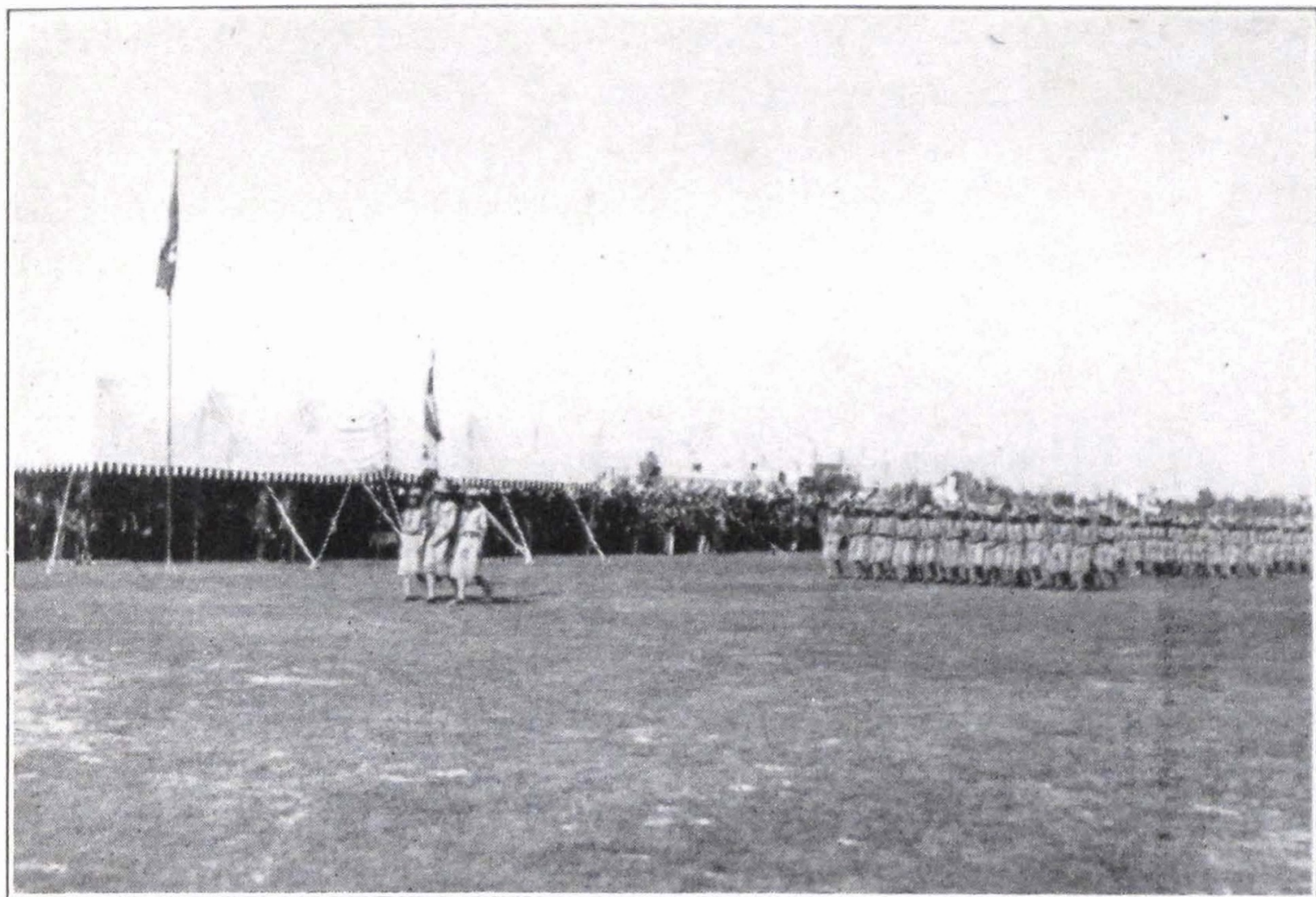
It says much for his progress that at the end of two years he had established a new system of rule which can be likened to the English system of the House of Commons

and the House of Lords. The nobility were not forgotten, in a country where there is and always will be a sharp dividing-line between those who can trace their ancestry back to the old ruling houses, and those who till the soil. The art of war still held pride of place in the hero worship of the commoner. But here, under the guidance of the new King, were noblemen of war striving for peace, and names immortally written on the scroll of warfare, now appearing on the lists of those who had triumphed in the art of seeking peace.

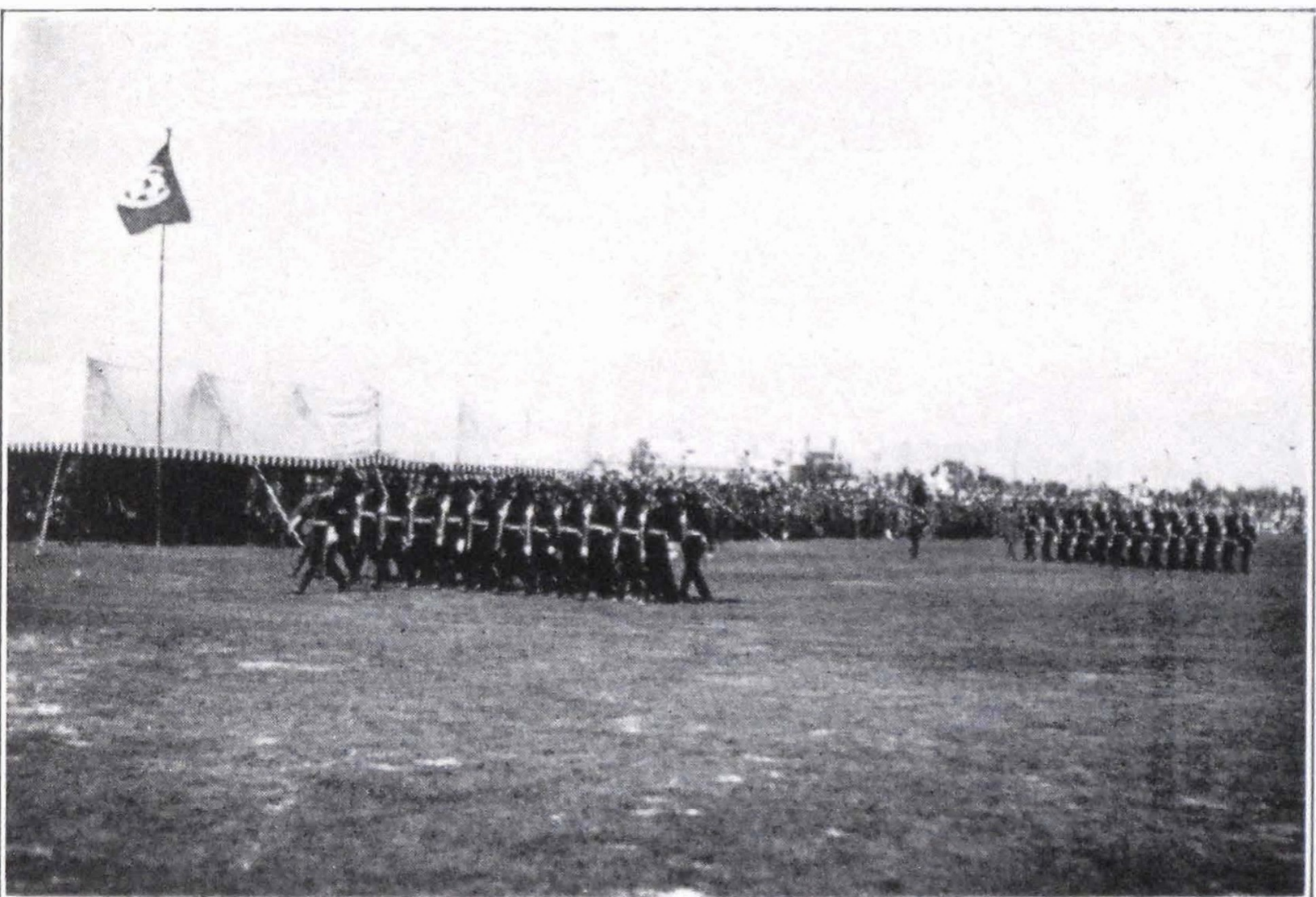
One of the most recent proclamations made by Nadir Shah epitomises the new spirit. It categorically details the freedom of the subject, the liberty to vote, and the democracy of the new system of government. The "Independence of the State" is put down as of primary importance in the new programme of government. "Individual freedom from interference" is given emphasis, thus recalling the bad old days when no man knew what would be called his and what belonged to the State, when no man knew whether he was tending flocks or tilling land for himself or for a rapacious collector of taxes.

It seems strange to read these days of a law forbidding "slavery or forced labour," but these evils were included among those banned by the new ruler. This is 1932, but the peasant in the highest uplands needed to be assured that he would no longer toil through the hot noonday, nor shiver on the heights in mid-winter, to add to another's power and riches.

"The safety of personal property is guaranteed." Here is a fine boast. The declaration does not say whether the safety is to be assured from robber or from State official, but this much perhaps is left to the small imagination of the village crowd round the Government envoy in the village, called by beat of drum, who perhaps



AFGHAN GIRL GUIDES, CORONATION DAY, 1930



THE BODYGUARD MARCHES PAST, CORONATION DAY, 1930

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take away with them the confidence that was intended to be transmitted by this good news. Such news must have travelled swiftly, for nothing like it had been heard before in the history of Afghanistan.

There follow considerable details concerning the *Majlis-i-Shora*, or Council of State. A Council is elected, and each member sits regularly in Kabul for the term of three years. It is the claim of the present Government that this is the first time in the history of the country that such freedom has been given to the subjects to choose their own representatives. Certainly, in past years, little attention has been paid to the elections, and the sense of bitterness against the Government has led to a general cynicism over the deliberations of the poor victims of the electoral system who were dragged to Kabul, there to assent to various schemes, more or less unintelligible, which were put before them for their approval.

The very spirit and fire of the man who rules Kabul, and conquered by his bravery from the scratch mark, reveals itself in some of the provisions for the government of his wild people. The public and the Press are admitted to the sessions of the Parliament, though as a precaution, the six newspapers of Kabul are under a certain surveillance by Government officials. The King can himself pass an emergency measure, though it must be approved by the next session of Parliament or rejected by them.

The decisions of the Council of State must not clash with the laws of Islam (hereby proving the ascendancy of the village mullah to his old place of power) and must be in conformity with the policy of the Government. Nadir Shah, who took so many chances with his own safety, is taking no risks with his crown.

Side by side with the Council of State, is the Council

of Nobles. Named the *Majlis-i-Ayan*, it has referred to it all the decisions of the lower chamber, and its decisions in reciprocity go to the State Council. There is a method of referring to a half-and-half committee any question which is a point of argument between the two chambers, thus depicting in the statute book the favourite game of the Afghan (and of many European politicians as well) of shelving a matter until it is past remembering and past praying for.

Still, however easy it be to criticise the laws which govern the country to-day, it is a fact that these are the first ever framed for the Afghan which have given him anything approaching the right of free speech.

The bombast and the braggadocio of Amanullah are forgotten. There have been no utterances from the throne painting the roseate, and usually gory future of Afghanistan. There have been few claims to universal recognition as a first-class power, though behind the fervent speeches of the younger element there is often enough to be found a self-respecting and intelligent trust in the future of their virile, sturdy race.

There could not be a better leader than the tall, dark-bearded, and bespectacled King. He rules with a knowledge of the Afghan mentality more profound, because of his years, than that of Amanullah. He has passed the days of impetuosity, but can still thrill the eyes and ears of his people with the appearance of a true Afghan and the deeds of an old-time hero.

Afghanistan will never have an alien king. It is impossible. The Faith stands firm, and would resist even if other circumstances, more material than the service of the Prophet, directed that an intruder should step in. Thus it is that in history the man who is nearest to the Afghan heart has been able to lead where others have failed.

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Old Habibullah, the stone-wall Amir, ruled with the rod of iron that the Afghan understands. Amanullah allowed his restless mind to stray from the paths of reality. Inayatullah was a weakling, and no weakling will ever rule in Kabul. Bacha Sachao, self-named after the glories of Habibullah, outdid the natural cruelty of the Afghan in his excesses, while his reign was virtually over when his shameful caste was discovered.

But in Nadir Shah there is the true Afghan blood, the courage of the hillman, the wisdom of the diplomat, and the blind faith of the true follower of Islam, all combined. Such virtues are necessary in the land where strange rulers have sat on the throne, and lived to see their characters tested more severely than falls to the lot of Western emperors.

The news has gone round the hill-tops and the ravines. The shepherd's voice rings out in all its resonance to his neighbour. His voice is floating across the great distances, and seems to gather strength as it soars upward in the long wailing cry of the hillmen.

The news goes round. There is a King in Kabul who is of the Faith, who holds to the laws of the Koran, who is strong in the religion of the north. He is a fighting man, and put to death the bandit of the hills, that one that the fools called Robin Hood. He has made just laws, so that all men are equal in his sight, and bids them come to Kabul to make laws for their own kind.

They have heard that before. . . . There was Amanullah, riding on the wind of his own ambition. This same piece of news was transmitted round the ranges of the hills, and discussed often enough in the samovar shops. The peasant knew the end of that, how by the rule of Amanullah his treasures grew to nothing, how he and his family starved under the pressure of the

tax-gatherer, how the winters seemed the more cruel when times were bad, and how for months following his departure from Kabul the land was ravaged by outlaws and outcasts.

But there is the stamp of truth in the new declaration, and there are deeds to prove it, in the new and unfamiliar leniency of the Government collectors, in the ordinances of the inspectors, and the demands of the officials who take toll upon the roads, leading to the capital.

The hillman is taking heart again. He is believing the evidence of his own ears. Nadir Shah, donor of the first gift of free speech, free lives, and free representation to his country, has won already the grudging approval of his critical jury in the outposts



CHAPTER XVIII

A HEART-BROKEN EXILE—AMANULLAH LOOKS BACK—TO-DAY
IN KABUL—THE SILENT WATCHER OF THE HILLS

THE door opens. Into the sunlight there comes a short, stocky, and lithe figure in sombre black. The house he leaves is an unpretentious villa in a suburb of Rome. The windows are shuttered, and, in spite of its air of habitation, it seems a forlorn place, ill-cared-for and gloomy, as if its occupants had never loved it as a home.

But in the gait of the man walking along the wide pavement there is a certain briskness and energy. He has the stride of a man of purpose, a man of determination. He walks along past the vegetable stalls and the newspaper kiosks, and few people spare him a glance. They are accustomed to him. His swarthy skin, indeed, is not very different from their own. His clothes are the clothes of the shopkeeper and the householder in that same street. Only the strength and the power of his shoulders, and the build of the strong man, hardly concealed beneath his jacket, distinguish him.

There is nothing to tell, surely, that this is the stride of any but a commoner. There is nothing to indicate the heritage of power, and the youth of omnipotence, that was his. And by and by, as he proceeds on his walk through the busy city, the stride becomes less vigorous, the shoulders lose their energy, the steps become less full of purpose as he realises that he is walking nowhere, bent on no business at all, striding to no affairs which need his leadership, hurrying for

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no purpose. Amanullah, ex-King of Afghanistan, tastes the bitterness of the ineffective as he idles away the prime of his life in a strangely lazy land.

“Peace of God” he was called. The name survived wars, tumult, revolt, country-wide bloodshed. The irony strikes deep. Even more bitter a wound is that inflicted by forced inactivity. Failure does not come easily to a man who had staked his future on success. He had never dreamed of failure. He finds himself now not only purposeless, but without fame. Of the kings who wander round the globe to-day, their thrones smashed by the anger of revolutionary mobs, there can be none so deeply wounded and humiliated as this man who walks along the sunny street, now halting in his steps.

For he was an ambitious man, and will never forget the homage that was paid him in the Courts of the Western world.

Amanullah need not fear poverty. After sundry rumours that he was on the verge of destitution, that he had left the East with little or no wealth, it was virtually admitted that during his last flight from Kabul he had been able to bring with him sufficient valuables to ensure at least his comfort and that of his family for a number of years.

The value of the diamonds, rubies, and emeralds brought out of flaming Kabul may have totalled £100,000. Reports differ, but it is certain that attempts have already been made to dispose of some of the more valuable of the gems to European dealers. On the proceeds of those sales, Amanullah and Souriya are now living in a modest way, trying their hand at occasional farming, interesting themselves in various industries for a time, and generally living fairly comfortably without the need for undue anxiety.

It is said that Amanullah, with his perhaps natural

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ignorance of the value of money, went one day to a Swiss jeweller with the more precious saleable property in his pockets. He asked a fantastic price for one stone. The Swiss dealer, knowing his man, and knowing also the value of the offer, shook his head in kindly but decisive manner. Angry, Amanullah went away without waiting for a return offer.

The dealer still smiled. He could afford to wait.

The next day Amanullah presented himself once more with the same jewels. He mentioned his price. It was less than half that of the day before. He was able to live on the proceeds with quite a show of luxury for some months.

There is no doubt that during the past two years other stones have gone the same way. There are children to maintain, and it may be expected that Souriya, the Queen who kept all Europe staring, is not as adept as the house-proud Italian women of the suburbs, in providing the daily fare. Still, there are kings worse off, and the most serious lack in that modest household is not that of money.

Amanullah has nowhere to go and nothing to do. He has few friends among the humble working people of the district. He has few interests in common with the neighbouring householders. He shares neither their working hours nor their leisure.

There is little sport for a man of his tastes. There are no long treks into the hills, no hunting excursions, no opportunities for a man to show himself a man among those carefully ordered suburbs of a great city.

Now and then there comes news from Afghanistan. His face lights up with every detail of events in Kabul. The Afghan State newspapers are eagerly read in at least one house in Rome. Such items that do appear in the Italian papers are devoured with interest and

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searched anew for any possible hidden meanings. Amanullah will never forget.

He attends picnics, given by friends in the summer-time. Now and then there are English hosts, and he delights to exhibit the few words of the language he picked up during his English tour. He is a boy once more, anxious for any audience, for he has never quite shed the pose of the eager and passionate youth. Then comes again the black despair, the sense of frustration which only the once-mighty can know.

Picnics, and he dreams still of an army on the march !

The trivialities of the suburbs, and he once saw cities beflagged in his honour !

He is cursed with imagination, to make his life the harder. He tests out his theories anew, struggles with his ambitions in private, and plans again the Afghan nation as he visualised it. Always, at the end of his vain reasonings, he comes to the same decision. He was right, he was right !

He sees now the same reforms that he struggled to effect, taking shape in his own capital. He sees the new Royal bodyguard equipped even more splendidly, capped now in bearskins after the English pattern, stiff at the salute in honour of an older, less vigorous, and more simple man. He sees his own dreams rising in stone and cement on the Afghan plains. Slowly, but more surely. Backed now by the support of a nation, aided by the willing hands of well-governed and amenable citizens.

Whereas he had tried force. He knew no other way.

He hears of a monument erected within sight of his old Palace, a slender white pillar flanked by victorious guns. The words on the simple but beautiful monument tell of the gratitude of a nation toward a man who rescued it from the effects of his own ambition.



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He reads of a contented peasantry and an amicable Church. His old enemies, always regarded as the foes of progress, are now pressing for faster and more regular advance towards his own ideal of "emancipation." He reads of the taxes flowing smoothly into the Treasury, of an honest civil service, of a loyal army, and a gradually growing educational system, which will raise the people from the ignorance in which they have lived so long.

He knows the wireless masts in Kabul are crackling, whereas he had dreamed of their chatter, had worked desperately to ensure their future, and yet had never been there to rejoice over this sure sign of modernisation.

The cinemas flick their messages to the people ; the telegraph poles are silent witnesses to progress and order ; the zoom of 'planes overhead tells of advance, success, modernisation. In his brain they all grew. Yet he never was able to drag the State from the financial mire into which it had sunk. Another has translated his inspirations into fact. Another rules in Kabul. Amanullah, who never considered defeat, stares at failure.

Often enough he must think of those chill nights on the hills, quiet eerie nights in the camp, when his dreams ran away with his common sense. Days of sport, and long hours of endeavour when he outpaced and exhausted the finest men of the hills in his pursuit. Days of daring and days of glorious adventure. Days of high hope.

Afghan mirage, seen once in the heat haze under the noon sun ; seen now in the smoke clouds, over a prosaic Italian suburb. . . .

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Would Amanullah ever go back ?

Would he ever leave peace, security, suburbia, to pursue once more the dream cities he saw in that vision ?

Amanullah, "Peace of God," is not the man to be

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content with a comfortable backwater. He is driven still by that very ambition which pressed him formerly into danger. His dreams give him no rest. His mind works still at the old problems, appraises anew the old schemes. He would go back to Afghanistan if he were given the glimmer of a hope that his people would suffer him.

He has been to Turkey on holiday from exile. During his régime of folly, the Turks held high authority in Kabul. In the uniforms of Army commanders, of civil overlords, and Government advisers, they were put in enviable positions in the ruling classes. Their military reputation went to Kabul before them, and for some time many of the Afghan recruits received their first education in military affairs from *tarbushed* and overbearing Turkish officers with the Afghan crest on their shoulder badges.

Sometimes they got into trouble. Even at the height of his power, Amanullah was unable to prevent one of his most favoured commanders from being tried by the civil authorities for a parade-ground attack on a recruit. The evidence was to the effect that the officer had insulted and cruelly treated the Afghan. The defence was that by no strategy or explanation could the recruit be persuaded to keep his feet together while standing at attention! The highly efficient Turkish officers found their military prowess and patience highly taxed when it came to teaching discipline to young Afghanistan.

But Amanullah's name stood high in Constantinople. The Crescent knows no boundaries of country or colour, and the warrior Afghans were well esteemed among the military classes of Turkey.

At one time there must have been Turkish dreams of a powerful and strategically situated ally to the north of India, and it is natural that hopes rose higher when

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Amanullah responded to their approval by engaging a considerable cadre of Turkish officers for work on Kabul parade grounds.

The reason for Amanullah's visit to Constantinople, therefore, can be understood. He must have travelled there with an ear ready for the slightest hint that he would be supported if he returned to his own country. He must have ached for the mere whisper of the approval that he desired. Such is his ambition, he must have already visualised himself returning, perhaps even at the head of Turkish troops.

But no word came. Even his flatterers were not foolish enough to let their minds rest on such a project. Often enough he has reminded himself that his country is closed to him for always. But every time the hope returns.

So we leave him, broken and dispirited, a prey to ever-recurring torments that are more wounding than the pangs of remorse. We leave him in the unromantic surroundings of suburbia, in ignominy and modesty. We leave him, however, still the man of action, still young, still afire with energy and the vital but dangerous flames of ambition.

Day after day his thoughts cross the water, leave the pampered boundaries of Western civilisation, cross burning plains and the high hills ; pass through the ordered and awesome last barriers of the British Army in India ; come eventually to the shaded groves of Jallalabad, to the wide sweep of the Pamirs, to crowded, rambling Kabul City.

To the throne. . . .

To Nadir Shah, King in his stead, staid and statesmanly gentleman of culture with steel spectacles and an orthodox and confidence-inspiring black beard.

His thoughts rove round the new kingdom. Ponder

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on the new roads, the new cities, hear sounds that he heard once in his dreams of the new Afghanistan. His thoughts centre on the new flag, black and red and green, symbolic of sorrow, glory, and peace, which waves over the old fortress of Kabul, showing its arch and pulpit for all the world to divine its meaning.

He sees a great pastoral land in peace—in the strange and unusual condition of uninterrupted work. He senses the heart of the people loyal to a new king. He knows now, that he was defeated, never to return.

In Amanullah, Nadir Shah has a critic inevitably biassed but tragically experienced. Perhaps the criticism is not harsh, but approving and constructive. Perhaps the considered verdict of the brave failure on the subject of the diplomatic success is kindly and well disposed.

But if this be so, then a miracle has occurred in the heart of Amanullah. He could not make the sacrifice of surrendering his grievances. He could never find it in his heart to be a watcher of any disposition but bitterness and envy.

And Amanullah knows now that he will never go back. Kings never return to Kabul. Most of them who fail, would not even achieve security in a Roman suburb.

The remaining years of the brave, foolhardy first King of the Afghans must be spent in watching his successor. . . .

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But Nadir Khan has another keen watcher.

More critical than the verdict of the Western world, less tolerant than the jury of his countrymen, a man and a class.

As the sun sinks behind the white fringe of the Pamirs,

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and the evening notes of the Muezzin's voice floats up in the still air to the hills, a man comes out of his rough shanty and faces the sunset.

He listens intent, and bows his head to the ground. Long minutes he spends on the ground, bowing till the grey head touches the fringe of his mat. The palms of the hand are laid flat on the ground, the knees are drawn up to the chest.

Then he straightens himself, bows once with the head only, and looks below him to the valley of Paghman.

The mullah, solitary and content with a satisfaction unknown in the West, considers his time and his epoch. He brings to the task a detached and independent viewpoint unattainable by the irreligious. He calls on the wisdom of a hundred years, the learning of one holy book, the traditions of a rigid caste. He is of another age, unchangeable.

He watches progress under the reign of King Nadir Shah. Down below where the valley unfolds before his old eyes, he has seen progress before. It was startling enough, it brought strange noises and strange sights. He saw motor cars come. He saw buildings rise with a clatter of many workmen aided by many ingenious devices.

He was interested, but never materially.

He remembers the time when the evening voice from the Mosque was hard to hear, up the hill. Only the faint echo of it came to his waiting ears. The long wailing note reached him through the screech of motor horns, the clatter of crowds, the clash of massed bands and the tramp of marching feet.

There were flags in the valley, and before him a great gross pink building arose, whose meaning he did not trouble to inquire. He had heard it was to house a modern invention for the amusement of the people. He

thrilled to the shame of it being taller than the Mosque, true centre of Afghan life.

The drums ceased beating, the regular stamp of feet was heard no more. There were no more flags in the green valley, no more bands in the round bandstand below his mountain retreat. Only, from Kabul, there rose in the air, day and night increasingly, the smoke of burning buildings, the acrid scent of powder, the clash of warfare.

The mullah did not leave his retreat, but pondered the more and devoted more than his customary attention to prayer.

The crash of cannon reverberated through the hills. The drone of 'planes, strange, ungodly apparitions at which he shuddered, filled the air. He was afraid, not for himself, for he was past fear and believed in the goodness of Allah, but for his countrymen.

An infidel King had gone. That much he knew. That much he prophesied, long ago, when he was told that the mullahs held no more their power through the land. That much he knew when it was noised abroad that this Amanullah, this "Peace of God," was thirsting for war, for novelty, for the infidel ways of the countries across the Black Water.

News came regularly to him over the hills. He learnt of the shameful departure of the Amir to the West. He learnt of the abandonment of the *purdah*, the freedom of women. Was the world crazy? Was the Faith of Islam a thing to mock? That way lay disaster. He was not at all surprised when the news came that the irreligious King, who had mocked the Faith, whose motor cars had screeched down the voice of the Imam, and who had persecuted the mullahs, had fled.

The old eyes looked down without excitement, without trouble, but with a pain behind them, in the brain

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that had since birth been trained to concentrate on the Faith, forgetting all and renouncing all.

Insh'Allah. It was the will of Allah.

Or, alternatively, it must be left to Allah. He had but the philosophies contained in that word.

There came fire and want and desperation below him in the wicked city. There were refugees passing over the hills, away from the smoking city where, rumour said, all was pestilence and famine and evil.

There came days of waiting, and afar off the dust of an approaching army. The city seemed to rise in the air, atop a cloud of smoke and an explosion. Was it the end of the world? The mullah was prepared.

But it was peace. It was peace, after hangings, and tortures, and months of harrying and want in Kabul City. The green valley reeked with cruelty and terror. He looked down with the eyes of sadness.

The months passed, and he learned that a new ruler was come. A man of the Faith, strong and sturdy in Islam. A man of wisdom, as befitted the true Believer. A man of some years, strong in warfare, old in diplomacy.

Great things were promised. Already it had been established that he had greeted the mullahs. He had publicly espoused the cause of Islam, and protested his desire to lend it strength in Afghanistan. Hopes were high.

Yet there came to the valley and to Kabul some of the same Western innovations that had brought ruin in their wake before. More buildings, higher than the Mosque, rose in the Plain. Motor cars, never to be seen without suspicion and doubt, sped along the new roads. The 'planes cast their shadows over him and his tiny dwelling in the hills. Could he and his Faith be safe while such things be?

The lonely mullah watches, unconvinced.

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From a realm of his own, he sees dimly the events of the material world, always in relation to his Faith.

As I saw him, that day above Paghman Valley, sitting on his crag while below him there were being enacted the nightmare ceremonies of a brave failure, he seemed to typify the Afghan, intolerant beyond the scope of our understanding, seeing through the evening mists only an incident in an age-long history.

Insh'Allah. . . .



